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FROM THE EDGE OF THE CROWD

BEING MUSINGS OF A PAGAN MIND ON JESUS CHRIST

BY

ARTHUR JOHN GOSSIP, M.A. (Edin.)

" I have took Him to life as well as I could, sitting so farre off, and having no better light."

BACON, *History of Henry VII.*

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TO

MY SISTERS

WHOSE UNSELFISHNESS GAVE ME MY CHANCE

AND TO

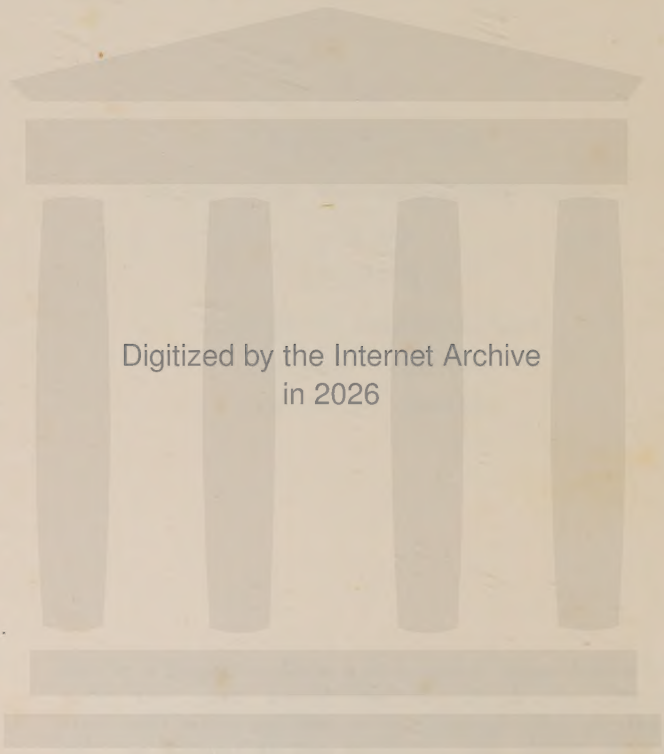
MY WIFE

MOST DEPENDABLE OF COMRADES

KINDEST OF TEACHERS

LOYALEST OF HEARTS

"I wish I might become a man worth talking of, if it were only that you should not have thrown away your pains. Happily, it is not the result of our acts that makes them brave and noble, but the acts themselves, and the unselfish love that moved us to do them."—R. L. S.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A NUMBER of these studies have already appeared in print. The first was a contribution to United Free Church Sermons (Thomson & Cowan, Glasgow). The third last was preached on the death of Dr. James Hastings, but I have here omitted the personal references with which it ended, as given in *The Expository Times* (T. & T. Clark, Edinburgh); in which periodical numbers five, seventeen, and nineteen also appeared; while the fourth, sixth, seventh, and thirteenth are from Hastings' *Speaker's Bible* (Aberdeen). Thanks are given to the various publishers for their courtesy in permitting reproduction here. In most cases there have been considerable additions and omissions.

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"Tell me, ye learned, shall we for ever be adding so much to the *bulk*—so little to the *stock*?

"Shall we for ever make new books, as apothecaries make new mixtures, by pouring only out of one vessel into another?

"Shall we be destined to the days of eternity, on holy days as well as working days, to be shewing the *relics of learning*, as monks do the relics of their saints, without working one—one single miracle with them?"—*Tristram Shandy*, 5. 1.

"Whatever talents a person may possess to instruct others, be they ever so inconsiderable, he is yet bound to exert them: if his attempt be ineffectual, let the punishment of an unaccomplished purpose have been sufficient; let none trouble themselves to heap the dust of oblivion upon his efforts; the pile they raise will betray his grave which might otherwise have been unknown."

SHELLEY, Preface to *Prometheus Unbound*.

"One must endeavour to speak his own mind, sure that though the majority sees nothing at all in what he says, the two or three who are at his stage will respond."

MARCUS DODS, *Later Letters*, p. 171.

"I, too, will turn my face to the wind, and cast my handful of seed on high."—*Gaelic Saying*.

FROM THE EDGE OF THE CROWD.

I.

WHAT CHRIST DOES FOR A SOUL.

"Unto Him that loved us, and loosed us from our sins by His blood, and made us kings and priests unto God and His Father."—Rev. i. 5, 6.

WHAT exactly has Christ done for you? What is there in your life that needs Christ to explain it, and that, apart from Him, simply could not have been there at all? If there is nothing, then your religion is a sheer futility. But then that is your fault, not Jesus Christ's. For, when we open the New Testament, it is to come upon whole companies of excited people, their faces all aglow, their hearts dazed and bewildered by the immensity of their own good fortune. Apparently they find it difficult to think of anything but this amazing happening that has befallen them; quite certainly they cannot keep from laying almost violent hands on every chance passer-by, and pouring out yet once again the whole astounding story. And always, as we listen, they keep throwing up their hands as if in sheer despair, telling us it is hopeless, that it breaks through language, that it won't describe, that until a man has known Christ for

himself he can have no idea of the enormous difference He makes. It is as when a woman gives a man her heart; or when a little one is born to very you; or when, after long lean years of pain and greyness, health comes back. You cannot really describe that; you cannot put it into words, not adequately. Only, the whole world is different, and life gloriously new. Well, it is like that, they say. In their own days people looked at them queerly, as at odd people fussing themselves about extraordinarily little. For they too had heard Jesus Christ, these others, had hung for a little on the edge of the knots at the street corners where He was preaching, but, quickly bored, had turned away. "There is not much in that," they said; and drifted off to other more exciting things: were annoyed at the imbecile people gaping open-mouthed after this upstart, who had crazed His head with things too deep for Him.

> "Ye foolish folk of Galilee,
> What is it ye went out to see?
> The reeds that waver, the weeds that float,
> A young man preaching in a boat."

Until the people, learning Christ was not the fashion, quickly streamed away from Him again, and left Him almost quite alone. And even yet that mood is commoner than one cares to think. "Christ," said a popular idol of our day, at one point of his meteoric spiritual career, "what is all this talk about Jesus Christ? I never saw anything in Christ that specially attracted me!" Why does He so attract you? Why, when you are on your knees in prayer, thanking God for His heaped-up benefits, after glorious and solid things like health and home and happiness, leaving all that behind, mounting up towards a climax, you say, "And yet most of all we thank Thee"; for what? That nineteen cen-

turies ago and more, a little laddie grew up to manhood in the back streets of a smelly Eastern country town, lived there for thirty years an obscure life, and then suddenly embarked upon what everybody with the right to an opinion told Him was a daft adventure, foredoomed to fiasco. And so, indeed, it proved. Three years or so, and they were standing round a cross, watching Him die; turned on their heels and went their ways, laughing at the poor imposture that they had stamped out. And is that really more to you than health (health is a great thing, as you will know when you have lost it), or home, or happiness, or all of them together? Really? "Don't lie to God," is Jeremy Taylor's first curt rule for the spiritual life, don't burn false fire upon His altars, don't offer Him more than you have to give. Really? and if so, why?

Well, here is a man who had known Christ long and intimately. And as he looks back over it all, he roughly sums the matter up in three things which, he feels, give some idea of what Christ has done for him, three things so great and wonderful, that all eternity, he thinks, will be too short in which to give Him adequate praise.

And first, He gave me a new spiritual standing, so he says. I was a serf, a poor, craven broken thing, with an elbow ever ready for the expected blow, born into slavery, with the shame and meanness of it in my blood, and I am free; and it was Christ who did it for me. That is a part of His huge gifts to me. He gave me a new spiritual standing. Mark Rutherford remarks in one place that he would like to add one more to the Beatitudes, "Blessed are they who give us back our self-respect," and with good reason surely, for of all gifts theirs is the most healing. So thought the

prophet of old, picturing us all standing before God, shamefacedly, in filthy garments. If only some one could blot out the past, could grant me a new start, could save me from my failure! If, if! But that is precisely, says John, what Christ did for me! And indeed we can see Him at it as we follow through the gospel pages, and watch Him coming here and there, on crushed and crouching figures, who have accepted their defeat, surrendered to themselves, have long stopped even trying, can read their condemnation in every hard eye, and themselves acquiesce in it as just,—that faded frivol of a woman by the well-head, pretty once and witty too, but that was long ago, tashed now and faded, fingered by too many hands, soiled and dropped into the dust, crushed there by any passing foot; that loathsome creature, battening on his country's shame, deservedly without one friend in all his city. Look with what malicious pleasure they stood close to cheat the little wretch out of the show! And yet Christ spoke to them as if they too had souls, and gave them of His very best, quite evidently sure they also could respond to it; let them see frankly that, whatever the past be, He for one still believed in them with all His heart. And, with that, the incredible happened, and a soul awoke where you and I would have said confidently that no soul could be. A moment they stared up at Him incredulous; and then, catching infection from His faith, leapt to their feet to try. And it came true. For, looking round on that far country with new eyes, a sudden scunner of it all, the mud, the swine, the half-eaten husks, surged through them like a nausea, and they rose up and ran from what they saw was utterly unworthy of them, now that they knew that they too were God's children. And for

that same gift of self-respect, we also must go back to that same Giver, with the same charity of judgment still, and the same kindly eyes. I know we are not worrying about our sins these days, not in the least. I know we simply do not credit that God can be seriously hurt by decent ordinary little trespasses like ours, from which we rise up light-heartedly, and go our careless way and clean forget about such trifles. I know that, because of that, the wonder of the Cross has dimmed for us. They break in breathlessly, these men of the New Testament. "God is at peace with you," they cry, "think of it, after the deliberate and impudent effrontery with which you have treated Him, He has no grudge against you, no ill-will, no sourness of temper; there is nothing in His mind but kindness and a longing, cost Him what it may, to save and help you who have broken His heart!" And we hardly look up. "I know," we answer calmly, "I have heard all that before." "God has forgiven you," they say, their eyes full of astonishment at their incredible news. But we are unimpressed. "Why shouldn't He?" we ask. "Of course," said Heine, "God will forgive me, that is His job." And we can stand and look up at the Cross, and turn and go our way, just as we came.

Ah! but it is not always so. When the birds are migrating, even creatures born within a cage feel that strange thrill, flutter their useless wings, and beat themselves against the bars. And days come to us all when in the face of Christ we see what our own lives should be; and, seeing, grow sick of that most desperate of all diseases, sick of ourselves; struggle and yearn to lift ourselves above ourselves, and to become quite different from this unkempt thing that we are, something cleaner, bigger, far more gallant-hearted. "But

ah! that a man might arise in me, that the man that I am might cease to be." Yet, struggle how we may, that other never comes. Our feet turn of themselves into the customary paths; and obstinately we remain our old uncouth, incorrigible selves. Nobody knows how strong a habit is till he tries to break it. Nobody realizes how closely we are all immured in the dark cell of our personality, till we are groping desperately in the blackness for some smallest egress through which we can squeeze out into God's light and air. I was a slave, says John. There are those who tell us he was writing in a convict quarry, chained to a gang of the world's most obscene criminals. And he could never get away from the pollution of their presence; lived with them, worked with them, slept with them, with that horror always there. And once upon a time, he says, I was chained to a hideous thing like this; and I could never get away from it; for, struggle how I might, the iron held. Because it was myself. But, thank God, that is over! For Christ has loosed me from my sins, and I am free, can lead a real life now. Always that is the note of the New Testament, always they are entirely sure there is no sin to which we need surrender, no habit that we cannot snap, no grace that grows so high, but we can pluck and wear it in our bosom if we will; that Christ's power in a believer's life is an exceeding great thing, that overflows and breaks and sweeps away our hugest measure of it. I wonder, do we really credit that? If so, what are we doing in these sorry prison-houses, bound by these rusty chains of ancient habit, so flustered and so tempery, so selfish and the like, accepting that as if it were the only possibility for us; as if the glistering promises were just fine words that, of course, cannot come really true in us

drab ordinary folk, messing among the machinery of common life? Do we not know that Christ can burst these bonds for us to-day, can lead us from our serfdom, from this cowed, uneasy slinking in to heel at the first whistle of bullying sins, into a large and ample liberty? He gave me back my self-respect, says John, granted me a new spiritual standing. I was a slave, and I am free. That is part of the difference Christ made for me. And that amazing gift He offers us to-day.

Further, adds John, musing over it all, He brought a strange new opulence into my life. Every one knows that an Eastern monarch is a very proverb for prodigality of splendour and extravagance of magnificence. And this man, feeling about for seemly metaphors, lights upon that as at least pointing the road. I was a poor creature, and Christ lifted up my head, gave me a king's life, full and rich and interesting, bulging with happiness every hour I live. Certainly that was our Lord's expectation of what ought to result. Look at the pictures that He uses. I knew a man once, so He tells us, a crofter, a poor soul who lived in a bleak spot among the hills, and who, toiling from early morning far into the night, could barely make the ends just meet, and not one joy or gladness bloomed about the gaunt and windswept spot. And one day, ploughing a little deeper than his wont, he came upon a hidden treasure; and with that passed at a step from that pinched penury of his to affluence far beyond his wildest dreams. And that, says Christ, that is the difference I make in every life that really grants Me entrance. Or take that other most astounding metaphor, of which He was fond. For æons on æons the world span, a finished thing, but dark, silent,

dead, till one day there appeared a something on its surface, a spot of greyness on a stone that spread, something far lower, it may be, than that. But with its coming history had begun: and the mind of man, the sacrifice of woman, the witcheries of Beethoven, the genius of Shakespeare, the mystery of Jesus Christ, all had grown possible, for life was here. "And I," said Christ, "am come to give you life." What that dull and eventless world is to the earth we know, with its colour and its movement and its teeming interests in crowds, that life without Me is to the rich life I give. So He declared; and so men found. We think of the enormous sacrifices of these early Christians; but what struck themselves was the immensity of their inheritance in Christ. Take that one phrase, surely the most daring that the mind of man ever conceived, "We are the heirs of God." That is what they felt about it, that not God Himself could have a life fuller than theirs, and that even He would share all that He had with them! Tremendous words that stagger through their sheer audacity! And yet here are we whimpering about the steepness of the way, the soreness of the self-denial, the heaviness of the cross, whining and puling, giving those outside the utterly grotesque impression that religion is a gloomy kind of thing, a dim monastic twilight where we sit and shiver miserably, out of the sunshine that God made for us, and meant us to enjoy; all a doing what nobody would naturally choose, and a refraining from what every one would naturally take; a species of insurance money grudgingly doled out lest some worse thing come upon us. Is it not a shame that there is not constant sunlight on our faces, and a constant wonder in our happy hearts? For take Christ out of life,

and what would there be left? I am the very last to sneer at this glorious life of ours, and this dear home where God has heaped so much on us. Ah! think of it, out of mere nothingness He made us, set us thus high in the scale of being, creatures who can look before and after, and hold communion with Himself, and think His great thoughts afar off after Him, all just because He willed it. And shall we take this wealthy thing and fling it at His feet, as a poor, petty makeshift business? And yet, take Christ out of it all, and what is left, save shadows blown along the hills, and gone? God, as we know Him, is a gift to us from Christ. And what were life without the great Companion? "If," said Voltaire once, "if there were no God, we would have to invent one to keep people sane." While Rossetti, working from the other end, sets this down as the crowning horror, that were there no God, we would be in this glorious world with grateful hearts—and no one to thank! Apart from Christ, might we not have thought of ourselves as mere ephemerids, here for a moment and then gone, and so no more of us, but only the great silence? But He has taught us we are august creatures, who will last as long as God Himself. Apart from Christ, might we not have shuffled through our mean life anyhow? But He has endowed us with the vastnesses of eternity, with their endless vistas ever opening out into something even better and more splendid, and their illimitable opportunities of growth and service. He gave me a new opulence, says John.

And we must take it at Christ's hand. For nothing hurt Him more than the strange unambitious ease with which we are satisfied with His first or smallest gifts, will not believe that there is, or can be, even in Him, anything bigger or richer or better. "Verily, verily,"

He keeps saying disappointedly to us settled down so soon, "you will see greater things than these." Why do you camp just across the border of the kingdom, in it but no more; when, did you but advance and take it, all the length and breadth and fulness of it is your own? Whatever you and I may have received from Him, however wonderful it be, that is at most only the first inrush through the sluice gates; behind that there is the whole infinite sea. This bare, unimpressive life of ours, with the lean shoulder of our natural character showing all too often through the thin layer of better things superimposed, like wind-blown soil, is not the most that He can do for us. He gave me a new opulence, says John; and we also must accept it from Him.

And last of all, and first of all, and most of all, He gave me a new character. For that, I suppose, is the meaning of that phrase about us being priests to God, and His Father. We ministers may have spoiled the picture for you. But a priest is at least meant to be one who cannot live for himself, like other people, but for these others; who is so hurt by the sufferings and sorrows of his fellow-men that he cannot get it out of his mind, but has to go to God on their behalf, and stagger back with help and heartening for them. And we are all priests, says this man, we Christian folk. None of us can live for himself, have caught the infection of our Lord's unselfishness, cannot but see that life is given us to spend upon our fellow-men.

Again, it is quite certain Christ expected that to be the case, and tells us so in many most impressive passages. Dives, as you remember, was a most reputable citizen; nothing whatever is alleged against him except this, that, as he rushed about his busy life, he

never noticed a beggar lying in the shadow near his home. "No," says Christ, "you never noticed: and that in itself proves that between you and Me there lies the distance between hell and heaven." To be self-centred is to be at an immense distance from Jesus Christ. And, among much that is depressing, there is this encouragement these days that the younger generation realize that. They are not obtrusively spiritual, they are not overfond of church, they have small interest in matters theological, are indeed frankly bored and puzzled by them for the most part; but they do see that a religion to be real must be a service, must be a self-sacrifice: are drawn to Christ, not so much by what He gives, rather by what He asks; are touched that He has need of us, and deigns to put plans that are dear to Him into our keeping, to lean on our frail loyalties, to stoop to take from our soiled hands. If they come to Him at all, it is apt to be like Isaiah that day in the Temple, when he seemed to see God hesitating, looking this way and that, and heard Him say, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for Me?" Their hearts kindle, leap up, and break away before they are aware, and cry, "Here am I, send me." And that is no ill mood. As Buddha put it long ago to certain Brahmans (one is condensing a long dialogue), "You do well to seek union with God, but you are taking the wrong road. Believe me, you can never manage it merely by reading Scriptures and the like. For God is love, God is unselfishness, God is self-sacrifice. And the only way to become one with Him is to grow loving and unselfish, and self-sacrificing too." He gave me a new character, says John, has taught me to use life in a new way.

Well, what do you think about it all? It seems far off from you and me. Are we even trying to attain it?

We can understand that other passage in the fifth chapter, where these words are used of the redeemed in heaven, their hand at last upon the goal. But, "No, no!" says John; and sets it all down again—it would seem indeed to have been part of a little hymn commonly sung in their small gatherings—about the stumbling, blundering, tempted, often soul-disheartened people round about him. They too had been made free, they too had had their lives enriched, they too were growing day by day into the mind and ways and heart of Jesus Christ. And you and I? Over a waste of years I well remember Dr. Rainy flinging out a challenge at our communion table. "Do you believe your faith?" he asked; "do you believe this I am telling you? do you believe a day is coming, really coming, when you will stand before the throne of God, and the angels will whisper together and say, 'How like Christ he is'?" That is not easy to believe. And yet not to believe is blasphemy. For that, not less than that, is what Christ promises. And what Christ promises comes true.

II.

THE SEEMING FAILURE OF CHRISTIANITY.

"What lack I yet?"—MATT. xix. 20.

THIS is the story of a really religious soul, ardent in the quest of righteousness, and possessed of such fine qualities as awoke our Lord's hot admiration and open affection, so that His heart ran out to him, much as yours and mine would do, if in some far-off country suddenly among the alien crowds we came upon a face from the old land; on somebody of our own race, with whom therefore we have much in common, and who can understand what is so dear to us, but which to all these others, jostling past the foreigner, means absolutely nothing. Yet, with it all, it is a soul largely dissatisfied, uneasily conscious that things are not working out in it as they should be doing. For years and years it had striven, hoped, prayed, believed; and yet there was so little to show for it all! What, it kept asking itself, have I overlooked? What is it I have somehow missed? What lack I yet, that there is not far more?

That is the prevalent mood of the better portion of the Church to-day. A breath of self-dissatisfaction keeps blowing through it: it is uneasy, in a sense it is unhappy. During the war, it was in a daze of shocked

bewilderment that it watched half the earth suddenly being trampled into a muddy batter by untold myriads of straining feet. And now, turning this way and that, with a kind of vacant lack of comprehension on its face, it listens stupidly to this angry babble of selfish interests filling the whole world with bickering and quarrel: cannot but see that masses of people, irritably shaking off Christ's hand from their shoulders, are openly flinging away from Him, and what they contemptuously dismiss as His vague uselessness. As in His own day they flocked after Him, feeling that this was the heaven-born leader come at last, imploring Him to take political action, promising Him their support in His bid for a throne; but when He let them see that His thoughts were not their thoughts, and that He laid the stress of things elsewhere, straightway deserted Him, ashamed of their recent enthusiasm, declaring there was nothing in Him after all, that He was only one of these religious folk with their thin insubstantial talk, so nowadays they are demanding something that they can see and handle; as they put it, something real, something solid, something that does things; while as for the gospel, they push it impatiently aside! Have we not heard that trite story for two thousand years, and yet look at the earth still? Why bother further with that obvious failure? All which might not affect us very much, if it were not that the hearts of many inside of the Church have an uncomfortable feeling that there is not a little in that view, that far more ought to be happening than there is to see, that somewhere there is something radically wrong; that we ourselves in our own characters, and that the Church about us as a whole, are not experiencing anything at all commensurate with what the gospel promises to us,

over and over, in the plainest terms. "It is *the* problem of life," said Marcus Dods in his frank way, "why does Christianity do so little for men?" Lord Chesterfield was a man of talent, and he devoted most of his time and gifts to the training of his son, who was to be a genius. And the boy grew up the merest nobody! Commenting upon which, Sainte-Beuve remarks, not perhaps altogether wisely, and yet surely we can understand him, that if the lad had proved to be a blackguard, it would not have been quite so tragic as that such pains and care should have been squandered on the fashioning of a mere colourless nonentity! And what dreams God has dreamed for you and me! what sacrifices He has made on our behalf! what unthinkable lengths He has gone to help us! And this is all there is to show, even for Calvary! All God's all, heaped up together, thrown in unreckoningly on our behalf, has so far produced only this in you and me, this touchy, tempery, unimpressive, pitifully ordinary character of ours! The whole stupendous enginery of grace has so far effected in us only this preposterously meagre output! There is something wrong.

For Christ's claim was that, much as steam and electricity have revolutionized the physical world, so He was introducing into the spiritual sphere a strange new power that would make impossibilities almost easy, and put things that had always been as distant as the stars within the reach of any one. And that power is a fact. For we have seen it in actual operation in many lives around us; have watched souls caught by these mighty tides, the sun gleaming on their white sails, pass out and out, farther and farther from the blackness of the river's waters, from the smoke and dirt and clamour on its banks, out and still out into the

breadth and cleanness of the ocean, till they disappeared; and for them there was the stately drawing to the shore of a rich argosy safe home. But we are somehow out of it all, lie in a forgotten oily backwater, unmoving, without progress; lifting and falling lazily with the mere flotsam and jetsam, ourselves nothing more. Spiritually, we are in the smallest way of business, with tiny profits and infinitesimal returns; know practically nothing of the steady progress, and the heaped-up riches, and the glorious inheritance that others find in Christ. As men, we have evolved to some appreciable purpose; but, as Christians, we are still crude undeveloped cells; in us the new creature still lies at the very bottom of the scale of Christian being; and, though the years keep slipping past, it does not seem to climb, or lift itself above itself to ever higher and finer and more Christlike things, as is the normal way. At best, are we not still at the stage of primitive men? What a bleak wintry life they had of it, poor souls! They shivered for the cold, they were so helpless, they stood and watched their dear ones die, and could do nothing, except wring useless hands. And it was all unnecessary, if only they had known it! For Nature had provided lavishly what would have met their every need. Under their feet was coal that would have warmed them; round them there sprang up medicinal herbs that could have healed their sufferers; there roared the cataract, which, chained, has given men almost illimitable powers. But they did not know; allowed all that to run to waste; lived a bare, pinched, starved life, within sight of heaped-up plenty! And in Christ there is all that any of us can require; a strength that is sufficient, a grace that is enough, for every possible call upon it. And yet somehow we do not

really lay hold on it, nor draw from it anything like what it could give us, are immeasurably more ineffective than we need to be. And what are we to do ?

In truth, it is not altogether easy to do anything ! And for this reason, that we have all been inoculated with Christianity, and are never likely to take it seriously now ! You put some of the virus of a dreadful illness into a man's arm, and there result a little itchiness, some scratchiness, a slight discomfort, disagreeable no doubt, but not the fever of the real disease, the turning and the tossing, and the ebbing strength. And we have all been inoculated with Christianity, more or less. We are on Christ's side, we wish Him well, we hope that He will win, and we are even prepared to do something for Him, provided, of course, that He is reasonable, and does not make too much of an upset among our cosy comforts and our customary ways. But there is not the passion of zeal, and the burning enthusiasm, and the eagerness of self-sacrifice of the real faith that changes character and wins the world. Nor is it clear how that is to be gained. For even the Cross seems largely to have lost its power upon us, to have grown so familiar as to have become " a twice-told tale, heard by the dull ear of a drowsy man " with no surprise, and little more than a passing flicker of half attention. It no longer startles, haunts, grips, lays compulsion on us.

Once long ago there was a provincial town, and a road from it that ran out to the state gallows. These were wild times, when life was cheap, and almost every other day some poor unfortunates were led along it to their miserable end. On a certain occasion there were three, and with them some street loungers slouching along to pass the time and see the show, and a little knot of distressed friends, and some enemies there to

jeer and gibe, and that was all, except the platoon of soldiers, cursing their ill-luck that had detailed them for crucifixion duty that hot and thunderous day, when no one wanted to do anything but loll. And so, a little more brutally than usual, they nailed down their victims on the crosses, and dunting these into the sockets, work over and nothing more to do but wait, chatted and jested, and yawned and stretched themselves, and threw dice and played games, anything to pass the time, till at long last the slow sun did dip, and the weeping women trailed back to the city, and the enemies with one last lingering exultant glance were gone, and by and by, everything over, the troops too tramped back to barracks. And that was all. It made small stir. Next day, no doubt, they did discuss it for a little while at the street corners, but quickly they passed on to other things that really mattered and were vital, big things like prices, and politics, and the news from Rome. It made small stir. And in our lives the Cross of Christ makes strangely little stir. Can we not stand and look at it and go our way unmoved, unchanged, unwon? One gathers that there was a public road near to the gallows yonder; and some passing about their own affairs, reviled and scoffed and mocked the Sufferer. But most, no doubt, went by without vouchsafing Him more than a hurried glance. It was so usual, and they had their own urgent things to think about; and how were they to pack them all into their too full day? Thus these crushed out that other matter from their thoughts. So it is still.

And what are we to do? Well, might we not do two things? And first, let us give Christ His chance with us. Have you ever really done that? In the Testament it is made clear that there was a queer sense of

power about the Master ; so that people came to Him, with the most unreasonable and grotesque requests. "My son is ill of an incurable disease, heal him," they would ask. But that is silly on the face of it, for things incurable cannot be cured. "My daughter is dead, raise her," a panting woman would cry, bursting in. But surely any fool knows that the dead do not rise, not here at least! Yet there was that in Christ that made folk ask such things, quite hopefully, and with the most astounding consequences in the most impossible cases! Take any one you like : which will it be ? Look at that sorry little knot of people standing there, well out of the wind, and far back from the road—lepers, poor creatures! What a fate! To be living a whole and happy life, and come one day upon that fatal tell-tale spot upon the hand or elsewhere, such a little thing, and yet enough to make it clear that life, to be called life, was over ; that henceforth it must be for them a fearsome thing ; and they be rigorously segregated with their kind, to watch in the rotting features round them what their own grievous plight might come to be. Such horror had befallen them! And into their solitudes there had kept blowing strange tales about the deaf hearing, and the blind seeing, and even lepers being cleansed. Oh, no doubt it was idle rumour! And yet, who could tell for certain ? who could be quite sure ? And if there were even a glimmering of hope that there might be anything in it at all, what fool would shut himself into that living death of theirs, without an effort ? And so they too followed, keeping afar off, and crying pitifully, "Jesus, Master! have mercy on us also, us who have such need of mercy!" And the thing worked out. And did you ever really fling yourself on Jesus Christ, and ask Him what He is prepared

to do for you? It is not difficult to find that white spot in our character. Perhaps you are tempery. Oh, well! you say, a small fault after all, only a flisk and a flash, and it is over! And yet Drummond argued that no sin in the world, not even drunkenness, has produced so much solid misery as that. And it is in your heart, and you know it, and do nothing! Or perhaps you are selfish. A clean sin, anyway, you claim. Yet all the spiritual experts are unanimous that it is the root sin of all. And it is in your life, and you know it, and yet do not care! It is a dreadful thing to be leprous, and not mind. Or, at least, how do you meet that challenge that Paul flung out at the Corinthians, when he swung round suddenly on them, and cried, "Do you not see how you are dishonouring Christ, you, who are 'just ordinary people'?" Just ordinary people; we, with Christ, precisely like the folk without Him, as selfish, as irascible, as worldly-minded in business, as domineering at home, till those round us, hearing our profession and looking at our life, come to the not unnatural conclusion that Christ is of no practical value, that it is all mere words, and can safely be neglected. And yet there is such power in Christ, if we would only use it! What He anticipated when He called us was that we would settle things for those about us, that He would be able to point at us, so much happier and more unselfish than the rest of folk, and say with confidence, "There is My case: show Me, apart from Me, anything the least like that." "My wife Lidian," said Emerson, "is an incarnation of Christianity." That is what we are all meant to be. And He could do that for us, if we let Him. Give Christ His chance with you; tryst with Him where the parapet is blown to bits and you are always being raided, tell Him that you cannot manage

for yourself, appeal to Him to keep His word to you; show Him His promises and, as Rutherford advises, ask him if He "puts His name to blank paper," and all those wonderful things that happened in the Scripture will begin in your life too. Give Him His chance with you. For that is what we lack.

And, further, let us be quite sure that we know what religion is; and what it is exactly that we would be at. For many, even after years of pottering about this business, seem to have never a notion of the real meaning and the fundamental purpose of the thing. There are those who are supposed to be pious, who are not really pious, but only spiritually selfish. And one can be selfish about anything, even about one's soul. And if one is, one will receive the usual reward of selfishness. There are those who are accounted religious, who are not religious, but mere spiritual hypochondriacs, for ever fingering their own spiritual pulse, and nervously examining their own spiritual tongue, like other fussy invalids. And so, before we leap up and set off again more purposefully, and at a mended pace, we must make certain we are travelling in the right direction. For it is not enough to have the feeling that something must be done, and with that start beating the air, with vehemence but aimlessly, with the result that we are tired, but no whit better for it all. Remember it was James who was considered the religious member of that little family at Nazareth; James, whose knees, says old Hegesippus, were as hard as a camel's through constant praying, James and not Jesus! In Nazareth Christ was known to be a good man; He grew up in favour with God and men, and God's grace was upon Him; but in that respect there was to His fellow-countrymen nothing particularly noticeable about

Him! Over the brow of the hill in the next village they had never heard, it seems, that the neighbouring town had produced a remarkable man of God! Partly because, as Christ Himself said, it is so human nature works. For that is a universal law that Montaigne sets down in his quizzical way when he remarks that at home he was reckoned as just a scribbling country laird, in the neighbouring town as a man of recognized business ability, farther afield as a noted author, and that the longer one travelled from him the greater he became. Partly, too, because in time, however loving His life, and just because His kindnesses were so habitual, they would come to take it all for granted, as His way, what was to be expected of Him, and think no more about it, as we all do with gracious spirits round about ourselves. It is only when they go back to God, says Browning, that we recognize we have had angels in our homes. And probably enough there was this in it too, that already He had those strange ways, which in His public ministry were to bring Him into such hot disrepute, and make His name a byword in the more church-going circles, that even then He consorted with queer people, and contaminated Himself, so they said, with sorry creatures no pure mind would condescend to touch. At all events, in His private days there is no evidence that the fame of His godlikeness had spread abroad, perhaps because the God He so resembled, and whose character He so reproduced on human scale, was not other people's God at all, but one more loving and lovable; so that, Christ being what He was, they did not recognize He was like God, nor even that He was religious, that here was the thing, toward which they were striving, being lived out before their eyes. And therein lies a warning for us, for many of them were

devout and earnest folk. "What are we Christian people?" asks Paul, "what are we aiming at? what is our function?" And he replies, "We are the body of Christ." And what is a body? It is that through which alone the heart and mind and will within can express themselves, and come into contact with the outside world. Suppose that after Shakespeare had thought out *Macbeth*, so that it all lay there within his brain, he had been struck down by general paralysis, could neither write, nor speak, nor move, could only lie. We could have known nothing about it; the great thoughts, although really there, would have been absolutely lost to us, because his body had failed him. And Christ has such gracious thoughts toward men and women round us. But we are His body, His feet who must run for Him, and His hands who must carry for Him; and if we, His body, fail Him, they can and will know nothing of it all, poor souls! Have we grasped what religion is? Or is it that we lack? Christ did not throw about that great word Salvation. But once, in the heart of an angry crowd, their enthusiasm soured suddenly into a growling muttering, He applied it confidently to a man who under the inspiration of His friendship had broken with his sorry past and his old selfish unclean ways, was doing what he could to put things right. Now that, He said, is what I call a saved man. Very solemnly He tells us that on the Day of Judgment we shall not be asked the questions we are expecting, but others that will puzzle and startle us. Those people on the left hand were, so far as we hear, respectable folk; their business books were straight, their home life was kindly, they themselves were clean-living men and women, nothing whatever is laid to their charge excepting this, that they lived in a world

needing their help, and were too absorbed in something, what it was we are not told, it may have been their souls, to give what aid they could. And for that they are cast out. We are here to throw what weight we have into the fight for God, and, like Meroz, we are cursed if we stand among our sheep cotes looking down from a safe distance at the wild tussle in the plain below. Even hell, says Dante, spues out such creatures. And we can all do far more than we think. Those on the right hand are quite taken aback and put out by their Lord's reception of them. They stammer and flush, they feel miserably there must be some hideous mistake somewhere, they keep protesting that it cannot be they that Christ means at all, that they never did any of these things for which He praises them, that they were always so busy and rushed that they had never any time for any one else, that they regret now it was so, yet these are the hard facts. It was not me, they keep declaring. Whereat Christ, we are told, looks at them lovingly and asks, But do you not remember this and that, producing such small nothings they themselves had utterly forgotten, to which indeed they had never given any place in memory, but which He has treasured jealously, with a heart that counts them very precious—that night when you were tired, and yet went out on an unselfish errand, that day you climbed the stair to visit some old body with some kindliness? On which, still more perplexed, they cry out, half-ashamed that such trifles should be mentioned, Oh, but that does not count! Yet Christ holds that it does; and that not very much else matters. "I will have mercy, and not sacrifice," He liked to quote: that is religion. Or, as Porphyry wrote to his wife Marcella, in one of the noblest letters ever penned, "Thou wilt best honour

God by making thy mind like Him, and this thou canst do only by virtue. Yet remember that it is impossible that he who does wrong to man should honour God. Look, therefore, on the love of mankind as the foundation of thy piety." There are many Mahayana Buddhists—you would call them heathen—and yet night by night this is their prayer, that if they have merited heaven, it may be given to some tired soul, but that they be sent back into this difficult world to work and give themselves for others, till there is not one being left, needing to be helped. Still call them heathen? The question is, whether with Christ's eyes upon us, we are fit to unloose their shoes! Or take the Bible. We are great upon short hours these days; eight hours, six hours, no hours at all would suit us really best. But in the Revelation we are told that what makes heaven to the saints is that yonder they work for God the whole twenty-four hours round, and never need to rest at all: "they serve Him day and night in His temple." That is religion; to forget self, and to spend one's being for God and for one's fellows; and anything that does not lead to that, and end in that, is fatuous and futile. Well, what do you think? Do you agree that we have come on what is lacking, what is hampering and thwarting us; that if we had a clearer understanding of what the main point towards which we are pressing really is, and if we gave our Lord His chance to do for us what He can do, a breath of new life would blow through the church's stuffiness, like a cool breeze in a hot factory; and we ourselves be constantly astonished at our steady progress, by the mighty power we too would find there is in Jesus Christ? But, as things are, "have we taken the name of Christ on purpose to dishonour Him?" asked Leighton. If we will not grant Him His oppor-

tunity with us, if we will not accept His help, if we will not allow Him to do what He offers and presses on us, then, in common honesty let us rise up and own, "I am not really Christ's, am no accurate sample of what He can accomplish in a soul"; and so cease to play the wretched part of Judas, and betray the Master with a kiss of sham allegiance, that misleads the world.

III.

ON THE REVIVAL OF SOME OBSOLETE NOTES IN WORSHIP.

"Set the trumpet to thy mouth!"—Hos. viii. 1.

HOW often in these Hebrew Scriptures we hear that same curt, almost desperate cry, as from a panting runner with only enough breath to gasp it out. These old days were unquiet times, with danger all too often lurking in the darkness, for one never knew when one's hereditary enemy might not be upon the move in some grim raid, the success of which depended on its unexpectedness; when life was all a nervousness, with watchmen upon many a hill, intent, alert, staring out fixedly ahead. And to them now and then there would burst in a desperate creature, barely escaped with life and nothing more, shouting, "Set the trumpet to your lips, sound the alarm, the foe is here!" And with that, as Jeremiah has it, a sudden gleam of light would leap up, and be caught and answered by a dozen hills; the trumpet blare its warning through a startled land, the peace of night torn into tatters, and in every street the sound of hurrying footsteps and the anxious whispering of women speaking low, because already fear was knocking at their hearts; all as it was for long enough in our own wild Border country. You remember that grim couplet?—

"They have burned my little lonely tower:
They had not burned it, for a year or more."

Things were settling down at last, and hope was springing green and vigorous as a field in early summer; and now once more from the other side foragers have swept in, and are writing a savage message with the red of fire and black of smoke; and on every hill road there is again the lowing of stolen over-driven cattle, and here and there a still form lying in the fields; while in the towns the bells are jangling noisily, and the burghers, buckling on their armour as they run, are hurrying to the walls. For once more the alarm is sounding. That is a note that recurs so continually through the whole of the Old Testament that there is hardly a prophet who does not use this metaphor. The sense of impending disaster lies heavy on their minds; they have heard God crying to them, "Sound the alarm!" and they ring it out over the world. That is what makes them prophets. Beware! beware! beware! so they keep calling. The times are out of joint, things have gone wrong, grave danger is upon us. Fools that we are! we have been living complacently in sin, and now who can save us from what is already on the march against us? Hush! listen! do you not hear? "The lion has roared," cries Amos. Run, run! for it does so only when crouched for the spring. "The trumpet has sounded, who will not fear?" Ah! it has come, then! "The eagle has swooped," shouts Hosea, terror in his eyes; sound the alarm, if indeed it be not too late already. The whole north country, Jeremiah breaks out, is like a seething cauldron boiling over; and that hot molten lava stuff will pour in flood across our land, leaving it desolate, burnt, blackened, silent, dead. "Set the trumpet to your lips, sound the alarm." But no one ever was so urgent as our Lord. It is, indeed, the custom of our time to evade and ignore His warnings;

to leave these grave passages that make the Gospels the sternest book in the world, unread ; to fall into the very trap of which John so solemnly warns us in the closing words of his Epistle, when, with the pen laid down, he takes it up again to add, Remember that this that you see here is the true God, and this the real Christ as we actually saw Him. Beware of fashioning false Christs of your own, to suit your own desires. "Little children, keep yourselves from idols." Yet we have built one. There are people who are made uneasy by our Lord's severity : who with a flushed face would explain away that scourging of the unclean things out of God's temple, as if Christ is ever kinder than when His lash falls sore upon us, as if anything even in Him is so splendid and adorable as that loyalty of His that will risk losing this heart of ours for which He gave so much, but will not let it peacefully settle down in sin, nor make pretence He does not see what is unworthy in us, but insists upon warning us with a fearful, gracious bluntness. Whether we like them or not, the words are there, red-hot, tremendous, not yet cooled with all the passing of the centuries. Read them, and they will scorch you, biting into your mind like fire. No one in all the ages ever blew so clear a blast of warning as our Lord.

That is a note almost entirely absent from the pulpit in our day. We have grown finically polite and composed and unexcited. There is no terror in our voice, no urgency in our pleading. To listen to us you would never grasp that this is a lost world, and that we believe we have discovered the one message that can save it, and are desperately pressing it upon men's minds, as their one chance. John Hutton in one of his books declares that there are times when the duty of the Church is to look the natural man in the eyes and

tell him frankly, in the bracing language of our forefathers, "that he is damned." That may be so. But if it be so, then the natural man is in a parlous condition, for he is not in the least likely to hear anything approaching such a message. We pat him on the back; we tell him he is a good fellow (and indeed he often is a great creature of God); we declare that really there is no vital difference between him and us who believe, till naturally he comes to assume that faith is an accessory of no importance. "Cry aloud, spare not," demands Isaiah, "lift up your voice like a trumpet, and show My people their transgressions, and Israel their sins." Whereat we shrinkingly utter a shocked protest. Sins! But is not that a rather vulgar subject? In any case, people have to be coaxed to church these days; and if you were to meet them with such heavy stodgy stuff as that, you would scare them away. Moreover, have not things been much exaggerated? Are we not all in a process of evolution, which is gradually lifting us up above ourselves, and these unfortunate episodes will naturally and in course of time be left behind? Meanwhile we need not worry: it is just a kind of measles, a childish ailment that we will outgrow, annoying certainly, but not, in most cases, really dangerous! Fools that we are, building our pleasure-houses on the slopes of a volcano, hearing the roaring of great fires beneath us, feeling the solid earth reel under us at times, yet paying not a whit of heed, till the crash comes. Whitman tells us that sometimes he feels that he would like to go and live with the cattle. They are so placid and content. Not one of them, he notices with approval, lies awake at night and weeps for its sins. If that be the ideal, certainly we are doing well, for as a generation we have reached an acme of bovine

placidity. But really it is, of course, a sign of smallness, not of strength. It was when Father Damien happened to let boiling water spill over his foot and felt no pain, that he realized with horror that he was a leper. And this insensibility of ours is a bad symptom. For one thing it implies that we have no spiritual ambition, else we could not be satisfied with such poor lives; that we cannot have thought out the fact of Jesus Christ, and how immeasurably He has raised the standard. Will you hang your wretched daubs beside the works of Titian and Michael Angelo and not be shamed by the enormous contrast; stand back and say, with a satisfied smirk, "That is pretty good, you know!"? And can you live face to face with Jesus Christ, and be content with what you are? Dale, who knew England well, declared with assurance that what we most need is to regain the fear of God. And we have grown more flippant since his day. And every one remembers that terrific passage in which Newman urges that it were better that the whole world died in extremest physical agony, than that one cheap lie be told, or one poor farthing stolen. At which we look at him as at a man pouring out empty words with no real meaning. For the Cross, which is the most alarming thing in the world, showing us as nothing else can do how dreadful are these sins of ours of which we think so lightly, what a monstrosity is this evil in our hearts that ends in that, has by some strange mental perversity made us feel greatly easier in our minds—like those unhappy wretches Bunyan saw lying in deep slumber in its shadow, who would not be warned of their danger, but pointing drowsily upward, turned over and confidently fell fast asleep again, and were lost upon Calvary. Sometimes Christ's heart cried out in agony because, while He was here,

eager to save every one and with no thought toward any except kindness, some He saw were worse for Him, not better; in a more deadly plight than if He had not come at all, because still sinning as before, but now against a clearer light. That is a pain one fears many are causing Him to-day. "It is not kind," says Unamuno, "to rock and lull one's fellows to the drowsiness of matter: one should rouse them to the uneasiness and torment of spirit. To the fourteen works of mercy learned in the catechism we should add one more, the duty of awaking the sleeper." Surely, if what we say that we believe be really true, if we are here, immortal spirits who will last for ever, long after this solid earth of ours has melted like a shadow, has dimmed into a vague memory of what once was somewhere in the infinite wastes behind us, if everything depends upon the characters that we are building here, and the use that we are making of our present chances, is there not reason for alarm, grave need that people should be warned? Why, they used to ask Mohammad, do you, who have so much to tell us of God's divine compassion, preach so often on the day of judgment? If, he would answer, you saw what I always see, Israfel, the angel of the judgment, the trumpet already lifted to his lips, with his eyes on God's face, and his head turned to hear, ready to blow, look round you at this careless, giddy, idle, foolish, thoughtless, sinful world, what can I do but shout to them in an agony of warning? It is a dreadful thing to be a preacher for one with some sense of responsibility. If, mused Ezekiel, almost shrinking from his task, if the watchman blow not the trumpet, and the foe come, the blood of all who fall I will require, with exactness, at the watchman's hand. "Set the trumpet to your lips, sound the alarm!"

But the trumpet was not only the instrument of impending doom or danger, far from that! Often its thrilling notes were used to rally and steady, to give that dash of reckless courage that carries through impossibilities, to stir tired hearts to one more valiant effort when every one else had broken, and thrown down their arms, and made abject surrender. It would appear that when Israel, rousing itself from defeat, went out against her enemies, the priest of God was there, with the trumpet in his hand, to put grit and courage into men, to fire their blood, inciting them with its heady notes to gallantry and daring. And that surely is a first duty of the pulpit still; aye, and of all of us to one another in this difficult world, where most people are much harder pressed than we would credit, with steep braes to climb, and winds catching away their breath; nearer the breaking-point than anybody would believe; though, in the gallant human way, their heads are up, and they make never a snivel of complaint. And it is our business, as Christian folk, to help them; that is why we are here. "Let us be kind to one another," Ian Maclaren used to say, "for most of us are fighting a hard battle." And years afterwards, when I succeeded to a charge once his, I found how bonnily he had lived out his dictum; heard nothing of his sermons, though he was a mighty preacher; but, wherever there had been a bairnie ill in his time, twenty years after they remembered in these homes the man who spent long hours pouring out wonderful stories to hot restless little folk, too ill to look at pictures, sick of all their toys, or peevish and fretted by their crumby beds. We all must see to it that we adopt views that will hearten, not discourage, those about us; that we so speak, so act, so bear ourselves, so look out upon life,

as to make others surer of God, as Erskine of Linlathen always seemed to bring Him nearer, more able to hold out bravely, because they have caught the infection of our courage. Anything else for Christian folk is treason: for us to move about depressed and gloomy-hearted is sheer treachery. We are the officers, we Christian men and women; it is for us to set the standard, and to rally others. To dispirit and depress another is a serious breach of the King's Regulations. "In the dark perils of war," says Trevelyan of an officer whose buoyant audacity played a noble part in the Mutiny, "in the high places of the field, hope shone in him like a pillar of fire, when it had gone out in all the others." That is the rôle assigned by Christ to us. The writer of 2 Peter tells us that to him the whole world seemed on fire, the heavens blazing fiercely over him, the earth rocking and tumbling in beneath his feet, yet he felt never a stab of fear. If all we know and love is passing, well, something better still is forming, a glorious new world, wherein righteousness will dwell. And a great Persian poet, describing the Day of Judgment—every one in alarm and terror, found his own heart unafraid, his pulses beating never a shade faster. "He who has led me thus far," said he, "will doubtless lead me still farther." But the greatest Master here as elsewhere is still Jesus Christ, with His amazing power of rousing hope in desperate people, and that through His own sheer audacity of courage for us that hurls its defiance in the startled faces of sins secure in their dominion over us, that will not admit that all is over, that rings out its challenge to our past with all its shame and failure, crying to us, "Up again, up again! you can still do it, and you will!"

Randolph the English ambassador wrote down to

London that the Scottish Reformation would have fizzled out, had it not been for Knox. But his voice, so ran the dispatch, "is able in one hour to putt more lyf in us than fyve hundred trumpets continually blustering at once in our ears." And Christ's voice has brought untold myriads of whipped and cowed and beaten things up to their feet again, with brave eyes and big and valiant hearts. And under Him we are the officers; it is for us to keep the others steady: to believe when others falter, to be calm when they grow flustered and uneasy, and take to looking back across their shoulders. We must not quail; whoever gives, we cannot falter; we must not let ourselves be swept helplessly to and fro by the blind surging rushes of the frightened crowd. Rather, as Patmore says:

> "Under the ever-changing clouds of doubt,
> When others cry,
> The stars, if stars there were,
> Are quenched and out!
> To him, uplooking to the hills for aid,
> Appear at need displayed,
> Gaps in the low-hung gloom, and, bright in air,
> Orion or the Bear."

And it is our hand that must point to them, and our voice that must cry "Look!" It was when his heart felt creepy, and everything he passed seemed ominous and menacing, and every little burn that crossed his path was somehow like a serpent striking venomously, and all the air was full of memories of old disasters, and suddenly his heart stood still, for he was at the fearsome place, that Childe Roland, setting his slug horn to his lips, blew a brave blast of defiance. That is the spirit for a Christian man! Up with the trumpet to your mouth, and blow a long and gallant peal of heartening and encouragement, for the grey earth needs it badly.

But, once more, the trumpet was used, so it appears, on days of victory and rejoicing. In the Kings we read how many things were restored to the Temple, yet, it is added sadly, there was no trumpet for the house of the Lord. That is a sorrowful lack: if it be wanting, then the worship is inadequate indeed. Yet we do not hear it often these days. "Victory, victory, victory!" cried Ralph Erskine, and died—a fine ending, to burst in to God with that shout of triumph. That surely is the spirit in which we should live, in which they did live in the Testament. It is the happiest thing in literature: there is a sound of singing in it everywhere; not melancholious hymns, like some of those made in mediæval cells, all a-chittering of teeth for very cold, a dreariness of desolation lit by a wan hope that it seems not unlikely may go out, and that meantime leaves black, moving, frightening shadows, does not flood the heart with radiance; nor sentimental rubbish like much modern stuff, enough to drive any manly nature from us altogether. These people really sang, for very gladness, because they had something to sing about. And so have we, if we would but believe it. I cannot understand why the Church is always apologizing; always speaking deprecatingly, even depreciatingly, about its work. Has there ever been a religious conference held since the days of Hesiod in which lugubrious voices were not chanting dolefully in unison, "Would God we had lived in earlier or later times, the golden days, for ours is the age of brass?" It is the worst possible psychology. Tell yourself a thing often enough and you will come to believe it, yes, even silly nonsense about the Church being like a Salvation Army band blowing its hardest up some cul-de-sac, while the populace pour along the main thoroughfares,

and never notice it is there. Why are we not exulting in the incredible triumphs of the faith? Even if things look black to your mind and at your particular post, remember wise old Halyburton's law, "I observe that, when I was at the lowest ebb, I have often found Him in the duty of thankfulness." Once, it would appear, discovering nothing for which to be grateful except this that he was not in hell yet, though that seemed surely coming, he began giving thanks for that delay, and as the stars steal out, one, and then another, until the whole arch of heaven is a blaze of lights, more and more reasons for thanksgiving dawned on his bewildered soul, till, the dumpish mood quite gone, he was athrill with wondering praise. Certainly a marked feature of Christ's character was His perennial gratefulness of spirit. Run through His prayers and you will be surprised how large a place thanksgiving holds in them, how often He gave eager praise for what would have soured you and me, and made us feel quite certain that God had forgotten to be gracious. Did He not take the cup, that awful symbol of things so near and so fearsome, and even then give thanks? "It is finished!" He cried, there in the gross darkness, with the shout of a conqueror. And to-day we have so much for which to give God praise. Immense as have been the strides in every department in the last hundred years, nowhere have they been so long as in the moral sphere. Eager spirits always grow impatient; yet appeal, as Emerson advises, from the verdict of the years to that of the centuries, even the decades, and you will see that never has God been more visibly at work within His world. A hundred years ago, in these great days to which we all look back so wistfully, slaves were being bought and sold within our empire: who

would stand it now? Only some eighty years back in these wonderful times—would they were here again, cry many eager voices—did they not drive poor little souls to long hours of hard drudgery while still mere infants, nobody protesting, though now our degenerate hearts burst into hot flames of clean anger at the very thought of it? a century since or so, they spoke of sharing our Lord with the heathen, and the world rocked with laughter at so crazy a scheme, with the Church joining loudly in the merriment. Yet to-day, who laughs now? We ought to be the gladdest and the most exultant people in the world; for we have found the key to our difficulties, and it turns; have come on a solution of life's problems, and it works. "We are able," cry the excited people in the Testament, always that happy "we are able": yes, and so are we. Mr. Chesterton, replying to the gibe that the Salvation Army is a corybantic type of Christianity, asserts that its methods are unchallengeable; "for," says he, "every real Christian who believes in his faith must do two things, he will dance, and he will fight; dance, for sheer happiness; make war because he has discovered something that is irresistible, and opens a sure path to triumph." That is the spirit that gains recruits. But is it ours? Don Quixote made a visor out of cardboard, and then he tried it with his sword, and slit it through: on which he patched it up, but did not test it again. We will just assume, he told himself, that this is a good visor. So, we do not really expect our faith to be efficient. We say of course it is, but always in the back of our minds we have the feeling that not much can come of it; that it is wiser not to test it seriously; and so the Church keeps drifting into agreement with the favourite remark of that odd mixture, Lord Melbourne, "Better try to

do no good, then you'll get into no scrapes" ; in which saying there lies much cynical knowledge of life, but no faith at all. Look at the people of the Testament, what gallant dreams they dreamed, what splendid hopes they nursed, what audacious visions their eyes saw, what incredible victories they gained ! They were a poor little company, gathered here and there into some garret of a dull back street ; nobody noticed them, yet they were sure that all the kingdoms of the world would become Jesus Christ's, saw a great heaven, vast and wide and immeasurable, with twelve gates never shut by night or day, for from all quarters crowds were always pouring in, from every corner of the world. What they themselves had experienced in Christ made them feel anything was possible. That is the mood that wins, and not this snivelling, this abashed despondency, this eternal murmur of apology, this feeling it had better be done, but of course nothing much will come of it !

> "Up, up, up and up !
> Face your game, and play it !
> The night is past, behold the sun !
> The idols fall, the lie is done !
> The Judge is set, the doom begun !
> Who can stay it ? "

"Serve the Lord with gladness," cries a Psalmist, "Shout, all the earth to God, breaking into music : with trumpet and sound of the horn exult ye before the King : let the floods clap their hands, let the hills shout together for gladness before the Lord, for He is coming." He is really coming, and every enemy of His shall be destroyed.

Set the trumpet to your lips, and blow a joyous peal of certain victory. Really believe your faith, and you will rally many a despondent heart and flagging spirit.

IV.

RUSTING GRACE.

"Ramoth in Gilead is ours, and we be still, and take it not."—1 Kings xxii. 3.

JAMES, who wrote rather in flames than with mere words, has a scathing passage in which, in his vivid way, he describes the moth-eaten treasures of the rich slowly crumbling into dust, and their piled-up heaps of gold rusting themselves uselessly away; and this, so he cries passionately with his heart on fire at thought of the sheer cruelty of it, in the midst of a needy world of careworn folk, desperate for lack of such a little of what lies rotting there. But, says Christ, there is a stupid waste even more criminal than that; and He looks gravely at our inefficient lives, with their dust-laden opportunities of helpfulness and service, and the grace that God contrived for us at what a cost, lying neglected and forgotten and unused, like all that mass of cunning machinery, the last word in its day of human skill and science, sinking ever deeper in the mud all along the banks at Panama, and left to fall to pieces there, when the French engineers lost heart, and turned back from an enterprise which, later, sturdier spirits put through and got done. And you, says Christ, what could you not do with your life for God and for the world about you, if you would but employ what you know that you have!

And, indeed, few things, surely, are more pathetic than the perfectly unnecessary loss we keep bringing upon ourselves through our failure to use our possessions. There they are, really ours; and yet we do not seem to make anything of them; lead a far more pinched and tame existence than God planned for us. Sometimes it is through mere indolence. Folk cannot be bothered, will not rouse themselves to face the dust and heat and straining effort needed for a real success: the cost seems to them too big, and so they let things be. But often it is through sheer diffidence and shyness. For there are many men, and perhaps more women, who form much too low an estimate of their own powers, assume faint-heartedly that the big interests in life are, of course, not for them, who obviously, so they feel, are built upon small lines, and suited only for small things; think of themselves more meanly than the facts warrant, and through undue humility rob the world of what they have to give it. Christ tells us that He often came upon that mood; on people, not perhaps greatly gifted, but whose life might have been quite serviceable, who threw it away because, so they argued, sometimes peevishly, sometimes without any heat, stating what seemed an obvious fact, anything that they could do, or anything that they might spare, what difference could it make? And so they hid away their talents in a napkin, let them lie and rust!

Our Lord seems to have found that in every sphere, but most commonly in religion. Again and again He is taken aback and quite distressed by discovering that so many people are not making anything like what they might of themselves; and this because they cannot credit it as possible for them. They look with open admiration and some envy at the cleaner natures and

more Christlike characters about them ; but they make no real effort to imitate them. Because between all that and themselves, so they assume, there is a great gulf fixed ; and for them it is as far out of their reach as are the glories of Chopin to a dabbler in music. And, indeed, for many temperaments it is difficult not to drift into that mood. Everywhere, we tell ourselves, there are some who have genius, and some who are mediocrities, and some who are mere bunglers. And in this spiritual sphere we are among the bunglers ; are not much hurt by our own commonplaceness—accept it, rather, with a kind of pious resignation. So it was fixed, we say, when we were fashioned at the first, and so it has to be.

Our Lord is not at all impressed by such thoughts. To Him that is not humility but mean spiritedness ; not a resolute facing of hard ugly facts, but just untrue. For the whole point of His message is that here is a sphere where no one is cut off from signal service ; and it is with astonishment that He gazes at the prosaic unimpressiveness which seems to satisfy ourselves, cannot understand why we will not take what surely we must realize that we are meant to have, nor use the possessions that we know are ours. Some of us acknowledge gratefully that we are little worried by most of the difficulties about prayer, by which others are harassed and plagued. Concerning intercession, for example, we are entirely sure that the faith and courage of an eager spirit can convey itself along these mysterious unseen filaments that link heart to heart. Once at the front a man, outwardly of small religion, said to me, " Why do you think it is that sometimes under heavy shelling, my nerves all a-twitter, suddenly and unaccountably I become calm and unafraid, ready to face anything ? "

And I replied, "May it not be that somebody is praying for you?" Whereat he stood still, pondering a moment with a queer light dawning on his face, and then rapped out an oath, "By God, padre," he cried, "you are right; it will be my mother." We have no doubts, for we have tried it; and we know it works, is real, does things. But Christ interrupts us. Prayer! He says. But you have never prayed, not to be called prayer! "Hitherto ye have asked nothing in My name." If you believe in this thing, as you say you do, then why do you not use this power which you know that you have? Some of us had a hard, breathless fight of it to cut our way through to faith. But we did it, and we have been justified abundantly. Faith! says Christ, with a sad little smile. Are you talking of having faith? Believe Me, if you had as much of it as even a grain of mustard seed, you would tumble about the hills, and lay flat the difficulties before which you lie and whine. If! But you have not. And yet it seems you are aware that it is real! Often we are amazed at what Christ has achieved for us. Things grew difficult, you remember; we had to wade through cold and swollen waters, and as we looked at them our hearts turned sick and dizzy; we were afraid, were desperately afraid, and at the crisis suddenly the light of our faith flickered and went out, and we were left alone there in the dark, with that fierce angry swirl boiling around us. Yet we came through: and we know how and why. It was only because we found that we were not alone; felt a hand seeking and gripping ours, guiding us safely, though our feet kept slipping on the treacherous slimy stones, till by and by we stood upon the bank, with solid ground beneath us, awed and thankful, with the roaring of the waters still in

our ears. And we look up at Christ with wonder, bewildered by His efficiency as a Saviour. Yet He, on His side, feels we are allowing Him no chance to work out for us almost anything of all He longs to do, of all His heart has planned! "Verily, verily you shall see greater things than these," He says, brushing aside all He has done for us as yet as the mere small dust of the balances. "Ramoth in Gilead is ours," cried Ahab in a sudden flisk of anger at his own idiotic supineness of spirit; and yet, fools that we are, "we sit still, and seize it not." And you and I must try to take it in that the amazing promises of the gospel are not just glittering words that we read longingly, and then must turn away, and, leaving that behind us, go back to our usual frowsy, undistinguished, spiritual life, as some poor creature, lost for a little in the sunshine and the glories of some entrancing film, rises to stumble back to the raw night air and the slush and all the meannesses of her real world. These things Christ offers us are facts, and can grow facts for you! "And the wonderful thing," said Rainy, as he lay dying, and they read him some of the Pauline passages, all a sheen of splendour, all a shimmer of pure gold, "and the wonderful thing is that it is all quite, quite true."

Barrie tells us that in his early days in Thrums there was only one soul in the whole place who advised him not to let himself be laughed out of his dreams, but to follow them recklessly, a bent, pathetic figure of a man who spent his long days squatted in his dreary little tailor's den, from which he rarely emerged. Yet he, too, in his youth had felt the pull, had all but ventured; and, so Barrie thinks, had really had it in him to soar far and high. But his heart had failed him, and he had turned aside to the dull monotony he had forced his

unwilling mind to choose. Yet all his days he had known he had been wrong, had thrown away his life for lack of some belief in his own possibilities, was eager that this lad should not make his mistake. And here are you and I, and in the promises we can read with pride what God believes that we can make of life. And we have not enough courage even to try ; are content, it seems, to be only this ; believe at all events that nothing more is really possible for us ! If we are ever to make progress, we must make shift to grasp that in Christ we have it in us to be vastly bigger than we are. Ramoth in Gilead is ours : and we must take it.

And yet look at a few of the rich provinces in the fair land that God has given us which we leave lying largely unpossessed.

To begin with, in the forefront of the gospel there are the offer and the fact of the forgiveness of sins ; and it was that offer and that fact that gave the gospel its power. At first people were hardly able to credit what seemed too good to be true ; they felt like an outlaw who, knowing that the universe is hostile to him, and that everywhere vast powers are out upon his track, with unwearying feet that keep following remorselessly, however tired he be; with keen eyes peering everywhere ; and that hide where he may, some time they will surely find and pull him down—who, knowing this, receives a free pardon, and is done with that uneasy existence, able to lead a real life at last. The thing staggered them by its glory and its bigness. But nowadays we have heard it so often that we are very cool about it, are we not ? It seems no very great affair that God should pardon us : and we are apt, without turning our heads, to stretch out a careless hand, and take nonchalantly enough what we accept as only our bare due. But

we have deeper moments when the facts come home to us almost stunningly: when to believe in the forgiveness of sins, of our sins at least, seems nearly impossible. And it is only when we wade through to our deepest moods of all that we reach, not a cheap forgiveness of ourselves, but that childlikeness of spirit that so fascinated Christ, with its trustful eyes, and its unswerving loyalty, and its huge belief in what is possible for God our Father. It is not easy to attain to that, difficult not to assume that God is like ourselves: and we know we could not stand one week such persistent and deliberate insolence as that with which we have treated Him. Don't you presume, we would cry with our temper snapping, don't you imagine that because I have forgiven you too often, and have overlooked too much already, that you can make a fool of me! There is a limit to this kind of thing, and you have reached and passed it. Off with you! But then Christ keeps reminding us that the most moving of human analogies are mere dim indications, nothing more, of how God feels and acts. That muddy puddle on the slum street does give some idea to the children splashing through it of what the sea is like. Think of this, we might say to them, become immeasurably big, and with these tiny ripples grown into huge billows, curling to their tremendous crash. No doubt! Yet "how much more" it really is—the scent, the colour, the music, the distance, the sting of the spray, the haunting mystery, all that makes the sea to those who love it, how could all that be brought home to any one by that dirty little pool? And God, says Christ, you ask what He is like? He is a Father, with a heart like yours to your own little ones; that gives some idea of it, and yet "how much more" He really is; still infinite in forgiveness though

your poor little well of it has run dry years ago. "Abundant" is an adjective they often use of it in Scripture. And abundant is a vivid word. Stand on the seashore when the tides are coming in, wave upon wave, until the eyes tire, and the brain grows dizzy, and still, wave upon wave, wave upon wave, it hurries in out of the inexhaustible fulness, full still as at the first. Such is the loving forgiveness of God. He is so holy, we think shrinkingly, we are so sinful and soiled and impudent! The end must be a flash of anger that will wither us into annihilation. Yet it is not, says the gospel. It is the Cross of Christ! It is that God pities you, forgives you, loves you, that His heart is with you in spite of it all; that He has done, is doing, and will always do everything even He can to help you: that He thinks of you as you do of your own sick bairn whom you must save. You? what does it matter what it costs you? So at the Cross; ah! look what sorrow we have caused Him; and yet see how wide-spread are His arms to gather everybody in!

Paul has an astounding judgment scene that takes away the breath. The old Egyptians of the early world went far when they declared in the Book of the Dead that at that awesome moment, when the soul is being weighed against the feather of truth, the god Thoth presses with his little finger on the scale, for the heart of the Divine is on our side. But Paul sets us down before the judgment seat, and bids us listen to our conscience railing forth its merciless indictment, and appealing confidently to God for a hostile verdict. And God declares that He has nothing against our soul: lays never a charge, but justifies us! Whereat conscience turns to Christ; and He, far from condemning, intercedes for us, remembers we are frail, is sure that even yet we can do

well. And that is what it means to believe in the forgiveness of sins! Do you believe in it, have you taken possession of it, do you use it, and walk in the warm sunshine of it? Or is faith for you only a trembling hope that flickers up and then dies out again, a mere perhaps, not the ringing assurance of the Testament? Do you live in April weather; often, when the sun is hidden, shivering in a sudden chill of spirit? Are you the plaything of your own unstable moods, forgetting that, as Samuel Rutherford put it, "our heart is not the compass that God steers by"? Do you find it hard, as Smetham urges us to do, "to ride high on the white horse of salvation," all too often find yourself trudging, footsore and tired and bespattered, limpingly enough, in muddy ways, because we forget that the "abiding facts don't change with my mood, do not crumble, because I totter and stagger at the promise through unbelief, but stand firm for ever"? It is true, thank God, whether we believe it or do not. That is a grimly dramatic story of the awful night in Egypt when the first-born were doomed. They had been told, the Israelites, to put blood on their lintels: and they did it. But when the dread hour really came, and that cry rose over the stricken land, till it was at their very doors, some of them who believed stood awed and moved, but with no personal fear, only an enormous gratitude to God. But others doubted, so one may suppose. Oh! they had put blood upon the lintels, but of course nothing could come of that! They, too, would be bereft: their dear ones also would be taken! And whitefaced, miserable, desperate, they waited, as the terror came nearer and nearer and still nearer, till—it passed! Whether we believe it or not, it is true. But why not enter upon what we are meant to possess? Ramoth in

Gilead is ours. Why not live on these sunny heights, and leave the crawling fogbanks of these low and unhealthy valleys? Why not have the joy and peace of believing? They say that in Paris they still show the old State books in which, under every town and village, there were entered the taxes due from each; and that on the page headed Domremy there are the usual official figures, but written across them in red ink, "Free for the Maid's sake." I suppose the villagers credited that, and did not painfully scrape together their taxes year by year lest it was all a dream. And in the book of the great angel of the Judgment, on the pages headed by your name and mine, there is a sorry record, but across it, in a deeper red, is there not written, "Free for Jesus' sake"? And we must learn to live, assuming that is true.

Again, the gospel is an assurance of the love of God, a confident declaration that there is no one of us but is surrounded by a particular, individual, unforgetting care, that we can count upon that as certainly as if we had God all to ourself, and He had never another thought, just you, just me. When men came home on leave from the front, they used to look with a proud pleasure, as the train slipped past, at quiet hamlets dozing in the hot sunshine, and men and women moving to and fro about their usual tasks, so safe, so peaceful, with no thought of danger. And with that they remembered the long line of men in the front trenches, and the eyes watching in the posts far out in no-man's-land. If they broke, ah! if they broke, across these peaceful places there would sweep a flood of terror and invasion. Yes, but they knew they would not break. And round us we have a continual watchfulness of grace that will not give nor fail, upon which we can depend absolutely.

"Of course," you interrupt, "why keep harping on the merest rudiments that every child knows?" But, frankly, do you credit it? If you do, there is, of course, an end of fear. Why should we, with a Father to take care of us, go through life as if we had no one but ourself to manage for us? And yet are not our hearts often very fearful? We think we trust God; but the smallest cloud, and all our faith is gone, and we have grown suspicious of Him. If we believe it, we are done with care and worry; "that care which," says Harnack, "is an outrage against God." Yet there are lines upon our faces, brooding anxieties keep gathering and whispering in the dark corners of our hearts, hinting calamity. Why do we not go forward and seize our possessions? If this faith really is our faith, why not live in the splendour of it? What courage it would give us, what happiness, what strength! Stevenson once stood looking down on a dead man, and wished with all his heart he, too, was safely through it. Why? Because at the back of his mind even that valiant spirit was afraid of life. But he who really believes with Christ is not afraid. I know, says James, that many temptations are hurrying to assault us. Well, let them come! We shall win glory from it, that is the sure end. Pascal confesses that the silence of the infinite spaces frightened him. But the whole-hearted believer is not frightened, "assured alone that life and death His mercy underlies," quite confident of this at least, though all else is uncertain, that he "cannot drift beyond His love and care." Look at the Lord Jesus Christ, with what gallantry of spirit He faced His heart-breaking life! And all because He did not only say that He believed in God; He did it, actually did it, always did it; did not allow even the Cross to break

His utter faith. Do we? The test will soon come. In the sunshine, while God's will is our will, it is easy. But when some hope crashes, or some dream goes out, or our circle breaks at last, what then? Ramoth in Gilead is ours. Well, let us take it. For we shall need this faith before we are much older.

Or, yet again, the whole point of the gospel is the coming of a strange new power which makes all spiritual triumphs possible. And yet lay our actual experience of Christ beside His promises, what we have got out of the faith beside what the saints gained from it, and how drab and colourless the former seems! Think of this so-called Christian land, of walking through the streets with Jesus Christ, of watching Him read the newspaper posters flaming out the result of some horse-race or some prize-fight, as if these were the most momentous happenings in this vast world; of seeing Him follow some poor creature reeling to his wretched home; and of His eyes as He turned to us and said, And you allow this kind of thing to go on year by year! Whereat, abashed and humiliated, we would answer desperately, "But what can we do? Of course we hate it, but the thing seems ineradicable, and we are utterly helpless." We! with a power that has pulled down much, the roots of which were twisted round the very buttresses of hell! If we would only take and use what we have in our hands, what would we not see in our days! "Impossible," they said to Danton, brushing aside one of his schemes. "Impossible!" cried he, "never mention to me that blockhead of a word." And the thing got done. And if we would adopt his motto, and would only "dare, and still dare, and without end dare," if we would really use the power of Christ, really believe in it, really put it to the test, what would

there not result? What vexed Lancelot in the days of his madness most of all was that puny creatures who, normally, would have fled from the shadow of his spear, dared in his weakness to check their flight, and challenge him. And surely we, who, with all Christ's power at our disposal, allow old sins to remain, and new follies to defy us, must be quite mad too.

Or take ourselves, Christ or no Christ, so spiritually undistinguished. All the old landmarks, perhaps, are still there: the temper characteristic of us twenty years ago is still a characteristic: and God's illimitable dreams and sacrifices for us appear to have done so little in the actual result, to be so meagrely justified. You remember the heart-gripping ending to *Beauchamp's Career*. "What's this?" the earl said, drawing away his hand from the woman's clutch at it. "She's the mother, my lord," several explained to him. "Mother of what?" "My boy," cried the woman, and dragged the urchin to Lord Romfrey's feet, cleaning her boy's face with her apron. "It's the boy Commander Beauchamp drowned to save," said a man. All the lights of the ring were turned on the head of the boy. This is what we have in exchange for Beauchamp! It was not uttered, but it was visible in the blank stare at one another of the two men who loved Beauchamp, after they had examined the insignificant bit of mud-bank life remaining in this world in place of him.

And must there not be pain in God's eyes, and sore disappointment in His heart, when He looks at you and me, with our pathetically ordinary characters. And this is all I have for Calvary! Why do we not use our faith? Ramoth in Gilead is ours: up, then, and let us take it. Here is a power which instances innumerable and beyond questioning prove could do anything for us,

if we would but employ it : and we let it lie and rust. "Alas, alas," wailed Mohammad's one remaining follower, as the pursuers closed in on their hiding-place, "we are undone : for what are two against so many ?" "Not so," whispered back the prophet, "we are not two, but three ; for God is with us." Yes, there are always two of us at least. However lonely be the road we have one sure Companion ; however personal be the sorrow, one other shoulder bears our burden with us. And Christ and we together, ought we not to be able to carry things through with honour ? However far we wander from Him, He is always with us ; never so certainly as in the heart of a temptation, never so close as when He stoops to lift us after some grievous fall ; not really far away, though we may feel cut off from Him, like a delirious child still calling, calling for the mother, who is bending over it, with her love in her eyes : so, as we sleep He watches over us, and as we go our careless way into the dangerous world with its distractions and temptations He Himself is close beside us, holding His shield over us, guarding us from how many fiery darts of which we never know ! Always His eyes are on us, always His hand steadies us, always His grace, like a sword never in the sheath, is ready to defend, to parry, to attack whatever dare molest us.

"Lo ! I am with you all the days," I never leave you though you desert Me, I never relax My watch and guard, though you sleep in the enemy's country, I never tire, like you—"unto the end." Why do we not believe our creed, and live it out ? With such a Christ to lean upon, ought we not to be doing greatly better than we are ? The pity of it that we cheat ourselves out of so much that is offered to us, that we make Christianity so poor a thing compared to what it really is, stumble

and bruise ourselves where we might walk erect, are haunted by dark fears when we might live in peace and gladness, submit tamely to so many things that we might break to-day. "You must admit, my lord," said a confident critic of the passing generation to an English bishop, "that Christianity has not worked out, has failed to accomplish what it promises." To which there came the reply, "It has never been tried"—surely a sorry enough answer. Why should we not begin to try it, really try it, you and I? For if our timorous half-faith, not worth calling a faith, our trembling touch upon Christ's garment's outermost fringe, has wrought such wonders for us, what would there not result if only we would take Him, all of Him, with both hands and whole-heartedly? We could do all things through Him that strengthens us: we could be more than conquerors, you and I: all things are possible to him that believes: to him who believes enough to take and use and really try what we know that we possess.

V.

THAT PREFACE TO CHRIST'S LIFE WE CALL THE GOSPELS.

"The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach."—Acts i. 1.

WHAT Jesus did and taught—as a beginning!

And this is Luke's account of his own marvellous Gospel; his final estimate of the amazing life of Jesus Christ, far and away the biggest thing that human nature ever did, a thing unique and unapproached, towering there, in its height and strength and purity like some vast virgin peak, how far above the rest of us stumbling and slipping in the mud of our tame commonplaceness. And yet Luke dismisses it almost as if it were no great thing for Jesus Christ, or at least as a mere introduction, a first chapter, a brief preface, arresting, no doubt in itself, and very wonderful; and yet impressive mainly because of its sure prophecy of even bigger and more central things to come. "The former treatise have I written unto you of all that Jesus did and taught—as a beginning."

That surely is the very finest tribute ever paid to Christ. The rest of us with any eyes to see are held spellbound by the immensity of our Lord's gifts. And little wonder! For who can estimate, even approximately, the colossal difference He has made. With all

its knowledge, had the world not possessed these four slim pamphlets—they are nothing more—we call the Gospels, how bare and pinched and niggardly life would have been. Is it not here that we have learned to know what God is really like? Certainly there are most impressive hints and adumbrations elsewhere, shrewd and audacious guesses at the truth, which hit it with a curious exactness, and Christ is far too magnifical for His followers to grudge giving the fullest homage to the other Masters. State them at their noblest, and He still towers above them, by Himself alone. Apart from Jesus Christ, would you ever have suspected that God could be what you now know He is? Once in the Upper Room He turned in grieved surprise upon an interrupter, and remarked quite casually, as if stating a very obvious thing, "Surely at this time of day you do not need to be told that if you want to know what God is like, you have only to look at Me." And with that we hold our breath; for the speaker looks like a tired and disappointed peasant teacher—nothing more. And yet it was not blasphemy, but sober fact; so literally true that you cannot think of God except in terms of Christ; know that if there be a God at all, then He must have Christ's eyes—as kind, as searching, as understanding; and hands like Christ's work-hardened hands, ever leaping out in new unselfishness; must live His life after Christ's very fashion; that this we see is, so to say, the same thing reduced to human scale, and lived within the limits of our human possibilities.

Is it not there, too, we have found what our own life might be, come upon new and honouring standards for ourselves before which our poor character and conduct, which we had thought quite creditable, shrink into

shamed unworthiness? As Alcibiades put it to Socrates in the Symposium: "Somehow the words of other people don't affect me much: but yours, even stray fragments passed on inaccurately at second hand, grip the soul of every one who hears them; make me ashamed of what I am, so that I know I couldn't live beside you and still be it." And is not that far truer about Jesus Christ, who has become a kind of conscience, that will not silence, to innumerable souls? When they do wrong, it is Christ's hurt eyes that they see; the pain in them that makes them miserable.

And is it not in these same Gospels multitudes have come upon that strange new spiritual power which has lifted them up above themselves, made possible what they could never do in spite of all their willing? It is pathetic to note how many—Wordsworth and Coleridge for two—have fastened on these old lines as a favourite quotation, aptly summing up the longings of their hearts:

> "Unless above himself he can
> Erect himself, how poor a thing is man."

And it is Christ who has endowed him with the power to do it. Of a truth "of his fulness have all we received, and grace heaped up on grace."

And Luke, too, knows all that, better, perhaps, than almost any other. And yet to him Christ is so big that he feels clear that even Calvary cannot exhaust Him; that, whatever we have received from Him, it is but the overflow spilt from full hands that are as full as ever, and held out for us to take it all: that always beyond the best that Christ has given us there is a better still, if we be willing to appropriate it. And so he writes his Gospel, and gives it as a heading the audacious

title, "A first chapter in the life of Christ!" "The former treatise have I written of all that Jesus did and taught—as a beginning"!

And that is but a vivid illustration of the characteristic attitude of the New Testament. Apparently, in those with any souls at all, to be face to face with Jesus Christ awoke a greedy spirit of illimitable expectation. Whatever He did they received it, with a gasp of astonishment indeed, but also with a curiously certain feeling there was going to be something even greater, even better, even more. As that blunt Roman soldier put it in his telling way: "I myself am merely a subordinate officer, yet what I say is done, because behind me, working through me, mine to draw upon, is the whole irresistible power of mighty Rome; and therefore the man goes or comes as I may choose to order him." And so, when people looked at Christ, they felt that all the power of God was at His back; that nothing was impossible for Him; that what He willed would to a certainty get itself done. And thus constantly out of their smelly alleys there came hirpling dreadful creatures, maimed for years by the hideous disfigurements of loathsome Oriental maladies, incurable diseases, as they only too well knew, and asked, with hope and confidence, that He would heal them. And broken folk picked up the pieces of their poor soiled, wasted lives, and asked that He would piece those shattered things into a whole again. And He met every call upon Him, the most foolishly impossible, with a strange glorious ease. They brought Him the old, age-old, problems that have always puzzled human minds; and without thinking, He immediately flashes out a swift impromptu that remains the final word upon them to this day. They carried out their desperately

ill, even their dead, to Him, and without any strain He touches them, or speaks a word, and passes on, leaving them—healed. It was not only what He did that so impressed men, it was almost more the fashion of His doing it, with its sense of enormous reserve powers not yet called into play, and so they felt that even more must come. Always, extraordinary though it was, it was only "a beginning."

And so it was in spiritual things. Paul tells us, in the Acts, that when he met with Christ his entire life was changed, and he himself transformed into another man. As he puts it in one place, what happened in his heart was only comparable to the creation of light—when the sun flamed up in the heavens; or when, long afterwards, one day groping and feeling its way through the darkness and vapour that enshrouded it, there came a just perceptible dimness, a greyness less black than the dark, that flickered on earth's face, and stayed. Light had come! And behind it trooped a whole infinity of unthinkable consequences—warmth, colour, beauty, life itself. "And," says Paul, "that day God, who made the light once to shine out of darkness, caused it to touch my cold, dark, sterile heart." A tremendous thing had happened. And yet even then he felt that this was only "a beginning," knew that the Christ who had done so infinitely for him would do infinitely more; tells us that a main feeling in his mind that night was that he was to be a witness of this that he had seen, and of other visions which he felt quite sure were certain to be sent to him! And Luke writes the story of the Crucifixion; and actually adds the daring postscript, "The former treatise have I written of what Jesus did—as a beginning."

With those who bring Him such an attitude of mind

Christ can do anything. And the reason of the futility of our religion is that we deny it to Him. No type of mind does Christ find more baffling than one that is so content with what it has, that it wants nothing more, and cannot believe in anything better. "Verily, verily," He says almost impatiently, "you shall see greater things than these." But that is what we find it difficult to credit. We come to Christ, and He does amazing things for us, and then we settle down. We have had our experience of Him, and must henceforward live our life in the memory and strength of that. There is, we feel, no more that we could have. But that is as foolish as for a child, having mastered the rudiments of the first primer—f, a, t, fat; c, a, t, cat;—never to advance farther, but to continue to old age reading only that, shut out by premature contentment from the real glories of our teeming literature. Whatever you have received from Christ, says Luke, however wonderful it be, remember it is only "a beginning."

And first, as to Christ's present life. Everywhere in the Testament they assume that it is being devoted to us and our interests as lavishly and as wholeheartedly as was that which He spent on earth. Christ has not passed on and forgotten us, as we move from a town, and after many years scarcely remember the acquaintances with whom we used to mingle daily, thirty years ago. What was the name of that man who lived across the street, we ask? For other friends and interests have blurred them from our forgetful minds. But it is not so with Christ. He has not finished His work of salvation, and, that done, laid it aside and put both it and us out of His mind, and turned to other things. His interest in us is still as acute, His affection for us as absorbing. Even in heaven His mind is full

of us, they say, constantly thinking of us, planning for us, praying upon our behalf. They employ many metaphors; but take one, how tremendous to their Jewish minds. It was the supreme moment of the year, for which all the rest of it was a long waiting, when the awed people, with a great intake of the breath, watched the High Priest, as he approached the veil, and laid His hand on it, drew it aside, passed in, and he was in the presence of God, was pleading their case yonder to Him face to face. How easy it had suddenly grown to believe, how far away the world seemed, how near God had drawn! But it soon passed; the priest came forth, and they rose up and went back to their ordinary life, and somehow they seemed to leave God behind them, to be moving farther and farther off. But for the Christians there was no such feeling. For their whole lives were lived in the happy vivid faith of that high moment. We have a High Priest, they said, always within the veil, always pleading for us, and God is always listening to His prayers on our behalf, and Christ's whole life is being spent for us so marvellously. It was not only three years that He gave us, no, nor three and thirty, but to all eternity He lives for us, works for us, loves us, offers continually a prevailing intercession for us. All He did here was only a beginning. For His love is everlasting.

Or take it, of our Personal Religion. I know that that is an immensely unpopular phrase these days. Plotinus blushed that he had a body; and many earnest-minded people of our generation seem to blush because they have a soul; to be really ashamed of any trouble and time and struggle they give to its culture and education, as a mere selfishness. Bosola, in *The Duchess of Malfi*, complains of

a new fashion in the carving of tombs. "No longer," he says, "do princes' images lie as they were wont, seeming to pray up to heaven, but with their hands under their cheeks, as if they died of the toothache: with their eyes no longer fixed on the stars, but bent upon the world." And to-day religious life seems to have lost not a little in devoutness, and seeks to substitute a rustle of energy. No doubt there may be this in what seem disquieting facts, that people are learning that the churches are not, so to speak, factories where religion is woven, rather power-houses, and that the real work is done elsewhere. But sometimes it looks as if they thought that no power is required at all. The patron saint of our bustling age is surely Wilberforce, who, when asked, "But what time have you for your soul?" replied that, what with meetings and committees, and endless organizing for the slaves, and this and that, he really had not time to remember that he had a soul! One likes the chivalry behind that mood; and yet is it not all a huge and disastrous mistake? "It is not what I have or what I do, it is what I am, that is my kingdom," says Carlyle. The Church to-day must take it in that untiring organization cannot take the place of the Holy Spirit; and that much fussy, restless, hard-breathing activity is not really as efficient as the rushing and mysterious winds of God. If you want to be serviceable to Christ and your fellows, it must be, mainly, through your own personality. If you yourself will live out Christ; will shape, with toil and pains, the dour lump of your character into His likeness till there emerges from it a dim something that grows to a face, Christ's very face, Christ's very ways, Christ's very nature—then, but only then, you can be sure you will be helpful to Him and to others. Tertullian tells us

he and most of the converts of his day were won, not by reading the Scriptures, but by watching how the Christians lived and died, until a wistfulness sprang up in them to gain this something so impressive that these others obviously had. So it is that the faith has always spread. And to-day those outside the Church tell us quite candidly that they are there largely because they see no difference at all between us with Christ, and themselves without Him. Cross us, they allege, and we are just as irritable as they are ; watch us in business, and we are every whit as worldly and as earthy in the make-up of our minds. We must get back to personal religion and to hard toil there, if we are to be really useful to the cause. But as it is, what has Christ done for you ? A marvellous thing, you say. And so indeed it is. For has He not convinced you that this vast Universe is not run on our petty human huckstering plan, whereby so much is grudgingly doled out for the exact price paid down for it, but is a place of grace, where all that really matters is given away, " gratis," as old Wyclif has it, just because it cannot be earned ; that God is Love, which three words, says Romanes, have done far more for mankind than all the discoveries of science and philosophy heaped up together ; that we are children living in our Father's house, who can depend upon His care and remembrance of us, His strange affection and continual unselfishness on our behalf, and so can face this difficult life of ours and all the daunting silence of the unknown future—holding who knows what—with hearts not too perturbed, and pulses calm and steady. All which means very much. " No array of terms can say how much I am at peace about death and about God," says Whitman. That is a mighty gift. To know that God is altogether lovable

and absolutely to be trusted, that we need never be suspicious of Him, nor uneasy lest He may forget. And yet that is not Christianity, but only its "beginning." For it offers more and better, greatly better, vastly more. Look at the Gospel hopes, the New Testament promises, what are they? If you will let me, says the Master, I can make you—not merely a somewhat expurgated edition of yourself, but "perfect": will so deal with you that you will stand before the Judgment Seat of God, with those pure eyes of His upon you, without shame or fear: will change you into My own likeness, so that naturally and spontaneously you will do what I would do were I there in your place. All this, of course, we know and believe in a way, yet have no expectation of it actually happening to us, and are not hurt because it does not. A bungling amateur at the piano is not really distressed because he cannot play like Paderewski, and though he knows that it is theoretically possible, never seriously hopes for that—contentedly derives a certain pleasure from his own wooden strumming. And we look with admiration at Christ Jesus, but it does not hurt us much to be so woefully unlike Him. That of course, we say, is not for us, is quite beyond our reach. And so, the full years come and go without any very conspicuous spiritual gains to mark them, and we are not surprised at that, never expected any other outcome of it all; are not taken aback because the plain definite promises seem to achieve little or no fulfilment in our case. As Seneca put it in one of his letters, "I am still toiling with all my might at my old task of seeking to eradicate my old faults." Christ or no Christ, we too have old, old faults; and they do not seem to leave us. Yet Christ came, not alone to hearten and thrill and inspire,

far less to send us to a hopeless warfare. He is called Jesus because He saves people from their sins. And, did we let Him, us too He would save. It is only a beginning that we have received from Him as yet; the gift He offers is not merely His affection, wonderful although that is; not only His forgiveness, though that sounds impossible, but His own character.

Or again, every age, viewing the Master's teaching from a slightly different angle, sees in it certain aspects that had lain more or less in shadow to previous eyes. And we must learn the lesson God is teaching men in our own time. There is no doubt that the rising generation lays the emphasis on brotherhood, and the service of our fellow-men. And probably there is in that a danger that we all may be swept by the current into speaking as if better hours and cleaner houses and more wages—mere social reform—can in itself satisfy and fill the huge immortal hungry heart of man. The Church, these days, requires to shout aloud and hold to it, "Man does not live by bread alone; he needs the Word of God." "What does it profit a man if he gain" shorter hours and bigger wages and a worthier competence and a fuller share in life, "and lose his own soul"? And there is truth, too, it may be, in Denney's stinging saying in one of his letters, that many younger ministers are "going in for social reform because they have no gospel," and think, like certain politicians, that is the way to gain a following. And yet surely it is well that the new generation puts the stress upon a central thing, and is not losing itself in mere bypaths, as the Church has too often done, has a blunt Johannine way of getting to the point, is absolutely sure that, if a man love God, then he must love his fellows also, and gives no weight to a religion which fails there; looks

round upon this world so full of evils and soreness and rank injustices and then at us, and asks with a directness that is disconcerting, If you allow these to remain, how dwelleth the love of God in you? To many theirs may seem a shallow, and an even irreligious type of mind. And yet Paul felt that faith was good, that hope perhaps was even better, but that far the best of all was beyond question love. And if they are emphasizing that, are they not on sound lines? Did not the Master Himself tell us that at the last we shall not be asked much, anything perhaps, about our souls except just this, "Did you so train yours that you could not bear the sufferings of others in the world, could not allow them to continue, had to rise up and spend yourself to put things right, so far as in you lay?" Surely it is the simplest fact that we are, as yet, only at the beginning of the Master's teaching here. "I believe," says Sir Henry Jones, "that our spiritual knowledge and practice, both individual and social, is so crude and rudimentary that we cannot even imagine the splendour of the results which an inquiring religious faith can bring to man." This we see is not Christianity, but its elementary class. It is so easy to lose oneself in words. We all feel amicably towards mankind, and so long as we ourselves are not pinched in the process, nor bothered overmuch, we wish them well, and hope their difficulties may be lessened and eliminated. But what comes of it? And how are they the better for our being in the world? Mr. Rowley, in *The School for Scandal*, remarks of another character, that he possessed "as much speculative benevolence as any private gentleman in the kingdom, but he is seldom so sensual as to indulge himself in the exercise of it." We have all a mass of speculative benevolence, but what comes

of it other than some broken fragments of charity, which, our own wants satisfied, we toss to the unfortunates who ask not charity but justice? Surely we do need to be taught the lesson which the younger voices keep reiterating, that if Christ laid down His life for us, we in our turn should give ours for our brethren; that what Christ claims is a "clean people zealous for good works."

In any case, we must remember this—that Luke's second life of Christ is called "The Acts of the Apostles." Stephen suffered, Paul preached, Peter toiled, but Luke felt it was Christ Himself who really worked through them. And to-day we are the apostles—the disciples—Christ's body through which alone He can express Himself. If folk are to be reached, then it must be through us; if the world is to be won, it will not be by theologians or preachers, but by ordinary people as they move about their common tasks displaying something in their character that will make others look from them to Christ, seeking a solution. To us there comes that staggering promise that, if we believe, the works that He did we shall do also, and "greater works than these." Wherefore do not let us be prematurely satisfied with what is after all only a foretaste and a mere beginning. We have been with Christ on Calvary, and have received there vast gifts from a Lord incredibly generous; but if we still abide with Him and journey with Him farther, He will do yet bigger things that will astonish us who know Him long and well; will send to us the Holy Ghost to dwell within our hearts.

VI.

WHAT SHALL I DO WITH MY LIFE?

"I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full." — JOHN x. 10 (MOFFATT).

WHAT are you going to do with life? There it lies in your hand, yours to dispose of as you choose. And as you look round upon the endless possibilities, for what do you think that you will pay it down? Once on a day there was another youth with His life all before Him, as yours is to-day. He also had to make His choice, and He did it. And happily it is given us to see His mind at work, feeling its way to that decision that has meant so infinitely to a world of needy souls. Mary had often hung over Him at nights when He was small, where the little head was lying sleeping, or held Him in her arms as He rubbed His face, in baby fashion, against hers, and had wondered, as all fond mothers do, what He would become, this little son of hers; what these pink, crumpled fingers would choose out of all the opportunities of life, where these wee feet would carry Him. And now the whole world knows. What are you going to be, the boys would say to one another, as they trooped home from school, to Him among the rest. And He would answer, "Oh! I have to go into the workshop." And He did, while others went to college and became successful men; in course of time would come home

for a holiday to the old village they had quite outgrown : and folk would tell each other how well they had done, and what a credit they were to the little town. While Jesus all the time was just the carpenter, whom they ordered about, and of whom they expected sheer impossibilities, being no doubt just as fussy and as selfish and as unreasonably insistent that they must be attended to at once, whoever had to wait, as are the rest of us. And yet He so ordered things, so used the endless play of circumstance upon Him, that He became the great High Priest of the whole world, to whom all of us turn instinctively in any trouble ; the author of eternal salvation to innumerable souls. And we can see Him feeling His way to that. George Eliot tells us in the *Mill on the Floss* how Maggie Tulliver, in all the fever and rebellion of her fretted heart, chanced on an old copy of the *Imitation*, marked now and then with ink grown faded and almost illegible through age ; and how, reading here and there where the long dead hand pointed her, she was directed by it into truth and peace. And, in the same way, we have still, as it were, Christ's own copy of the Scriptures in our hand, His very own Old Testament over which He had pored and brooded ; and can still come, surely with awed and reverent hearts, on markings made by Him, on things that struck and helped Him, on places where He heard God speaking to Him, on passages against which He was wont to lean His heart when tired and disappointed, on pages browned by long and constant use—His use. Quite certainly His favourite book was Deuteronomy : He had most of it by heart, on occasion thought in its very phrases. At the Temptation, for example, each of His replies are in the words of His loved favourite. But the quotation oftenest on His lips, it seems, came from

Hosea. "I will have mercy and not sacrifice"—that is religion. Here is a little bit of David's history that He found interesting, and here a psalm that haunted Him. You notice how original His mind was even in its Bible reading; how much He often saw in a neglected text that was quite dumb to all the rest of us, until He opened our deaf ears to hear; and how He turned away from the then popular Scriptures about the coming glories of the Messianic kingdom, and found His mind constantly straying to others, much neglected in His day, about a certain suffering servant of the Lord, who through His sufferings was to heal and save. Here in Isaiah you see for yourself, the parchment shows, how often it lay open. Always His heart kept looking back to that; always it pulled Him; always He felt how glorious it would be to throw oneself away like that, always the one thing that attracted Christ in life is what old Bishop Wilson called its only splendour, "the chance of usefulness" it gives us. Till, His mind turning from all else as waste of time, He rose up in the synagogue that Sabbath day, and took that awful rôle of Saviour on Himself.

And now as He looks at you, and marks how your eyes keep straying to the world's poor, dusty booths, He grows alarmed, fearing that you are going to throw away your life upon some foolish nothing, to waste and squander what is a unique thing that can never be replaced, to let yourself be tricked and wheedled into some grotesque bargain, like simple Moses Primrose so inordinately proud of his unthinkable gross of green spectacles. For Jesus had an eerie fashion of speaking of certain folk as dead. There they were, bustling fussily about their affairs, very real and obvious, jostling impatiently through the streets, with far too many

interests to pack into the too short hours. Yet our Lord used to turn and look sadly after them, with a half bewilderment upon His face. They looked happy and contented! And yet could they be? For that maimed thing they knew was not life, not real life, not what God meant for a real man. To Him they seemed only shadows, mere existences. For there was no love in their hearts and no soul in their eyes, and no self-sacrifice in their whole scheme of things—nothing that to him makes life; and He said bluntly they were dead.

Whitman once, looking down with that compassionate heart of his at a poor creature of the streets whose giddy, frivolous, foolish life was over, felt something rise up in his throat to strangle him; for he was face to face not with a sudden horror, but rather with an old, old tragedy.

"Dead house of love—house of madness and sin, crumbled, crush'd,
House of life, erewhile talking and laughing—but ah, poor house, dead even then,
Months, years, an echoing, garnish'd house—but dead, dead, dead."

So did Christ look with pitying eyes at the mass of prosperous, contented, ordinary folk.

Down the street, from His old home, just outside Nazareth, there was a farmer so prosperous that he had to enlarge his barns, and while still young retired, the lucky fellow, as we all would like to do. And then he died; and people went about saying how well he had done, and how much he had left, more even than they had imagined it could be. But into Jesus' eyes for once there came contempt. To Him it seemed so monstrous that a life, a whole rich human life, should have been thrown away only for that! And He stooped

down, and wrote with His own hand across the tomb that stinging epitaph, "Thou fool!" And that is why He looks so anxiously at you. For He knows He can offer you something infinitely bigger than these cheap nothings you keep handling wistfully; knows that what He has to give is not just something additional that can be joined on to the rest; but something so central, so foundational, so essential, so splendid, that without it no one can have anything worth reckoning at all. "I am come," He said, "to give you life." So huge is His own estimate of the difference He makes! That that you are thinking of is to Him just not life at all, or at best the thinnest trickle of it. I can give it to the full, He claims. And in the Testament those who accepted what He offers agree that literally it is even so; look back at their old life, what you are considering now, with a shudder; try this and that daring simile to bring home to us something of the glory of the change, finger them a little, and then lay them down as utterly inadequate, fall back at last upon the Master's own, as alone giving some idea of the vastness of the facts. We were dead, and now we live, a full and splendid life, crowded with happiness every hour. That is the nearest we can come to giving some conception of it. Look at that man, so still and cold. Around him there hum all the tireless activities of a whole world full of things; the papers have their staring headlines telling of great happenings; there is a crush at every corner of the streets; everywhere hurried people cannot overtake half of what they would fain do and see; and he is out of it, uninterested in it all, untouched by it! Hush! he is dead, poor soul! And once upon a time we too knew nothing of all that we now have, nothing of the amazing love of God, nothing of Christ's comradeship,

nothing of the glory of the adventure of the faith, nothing of the splendour of self-sacrifice. To all that to-day makes life to us, and without which we do not want it, we were dead. But, thank God, now we really are alive.

That note of exhilaration, that rapturous feeling of having escaped from the fetid atmosphere of a cramped cell—out of the darkness into God's glorious sunshine, out of a stunted thing into spaciousness, out of a poor invalid existence, a living death, into real life at last—meets one on every page of the New Testament. And yet how many look at Him, entreating them so earnestly, and pressing His gifts upon them with such eagerness, with frankly puzzled faces, and the question in their hearts: And does He really think I want these things; whatever would I do with them? "They will not come to me," said Christ, taken aback by men's obtuseness, "that I may give them life." And, as He cried that, surely He looked at them much as Drake, home for a little from voyaging to strange and wonderful lands, from the glory and chivalry of wrestling with wild winds and blustering tempests, with the salt tang of the seas still in his nostrils and enticing him afloat again, looked at some schoolfellow of his, fat and content behind the counter of his petty shop, absorbed in his tiny deals, excited over his poor, infinitesimal profits. In all this wonderful world, with such huge and alluring possibilities, he chooses that! So, surely, Christ looked out upon the world of men. How dull and tame and shabby and humdrum their life was compared to what they might have, if they willed! And are you going to choose only that?

Or did you so choose, and are you satisfied? Think again! for all those who have tried both ways of it

—and no one else has any right to an opinion—look pityingly at you, so pinched and poor and starved, with no idea of how glorious life can be. They tell us that the Eskimos migrated from Europe, and some tremendous cataclysm cut them off; and there they have been ever since, content with that mean existence, with the cruel cold, and the long dark, and the smelly, smoky hovels, and the oily blubber. Yet, had they stayed in Europe, how vastly richer would their life have been, with art and literature and music and a thousand splendours from which, as things are, they are shut out. But they know nothing of all that, are quite content with what, to Europeans, would be unendurable. And are you quite content apart from Christ? How have you sunk to that? For you were born with a soul. God saw to that. But you forgot about it, overlooked it, starved it; and, like a lamp whose oil has failed, it leapt and flickered, and went out. Stephen Phillips has a dreadful poem descriptive of that.

> "Then hungry grew her soul; she looked around,
> But nothing to allay that famine found.
> She felt it die a little every day,
> Flutter less wildly and more feebly pray.
> Stiller it grew; at times she felt it pull
> Imploring thinly something beautiful;
> For not at once, not without any strife
> It died: at times it started back to life.
> Slowly she was aware her soul had died
> Within her body: for no more it cried,
> Vexed her no more, and now monotonous life
> Easily passed: she was exempt from strife."

So, probably, is it that the majority of those who perish sink down to their doom—undramatically, prosaically, imperceptibly. That is sheer tragedy. Is it the story of your soul? Still Christ can give you life.

Over and over He promises that. And are you sure His healing touch has not fallen on you? Remember that the first sign of life is a cry; that it begins a poor, frail, peevish thing, that there is no surer proof of its existence than hunger and aching. And have you no longing to be what you are not, no pain that you are only what you are, no meeting of the requirements of that blessed Beatitude, which Christ inserted for poor souls who are not pure, or meek, or poor in spirit—some hunger for a righteousness you have not got? But that is life. Shield that spark carefully, for who can tell what may not come of it! One of the greatest men who ever lived was thought to be dead at birth; there was no dimness on the mirror, no sign of life at all. "He is gone," they said. But one woman would not believe it, and worked on and on with the poor little body, until there came a tiny glow of life which she nursed zealously into a flame. And all the mighty things he did began in that. And Christ's wonderful hands are at work upon you, and out of your poor, frail, impotent desires He will coax a splendid creature, with His mind, His heart, His ways; in whom at last even God's eyes will see never a flaw, and who will give Him signal service all eternity. All that lies in that spark of life within you, if you do not let it die.

But what exactly is this life Christ gives? That is not easy to define or even to describe. Buddha, in his day, used to puzzle his disciples by the ways—apparently conflicting—in which he spoke about Nirvana. For sometimes he would talk about it as future, as a glorious hope, as the far-off Blessedness that waited at the end for faithful folk. Yet often, perhaps just as often, he described it as a present possibility, as a Blessedness which loyal hearts should strive

to have, aye, and could have, here and now. To kill one's passions, to govern one's temper, that is Nirvana ; and whoso does that has attained Nirvana even in this world. Until at last, completely confused, his disciples came asking, " Tell us plainly, is it present, or is it future ? " And he answered, " It is both." Apparently it is the ideal, the best of which the mind can think, which begins here, but ultimately widens into something better, fuller, richer, into the Best possible, upon the other side.

So it is with the Master's teaching on Eternal Life. Sometimes we hear of it as future, and are taught to long for it as the final consummation of all things. But sometimes it is a present possession which Christian folk have now. " He that believeth on the Son hath life." " Whoso believeth hath eternal life." Certainly Christ urges upon you in the building of your life to take long views, to remember you are an immortal spirit, and that this world is a very passing incident, the merest wayside episode in your career ; yet it is a mistake to define it simply as a synonym for Immortality, as what awaits those who have conquered in the other world. It is that, but it is more. It ends in that, but, so to end, it begins here, and people have Eternal Life in time. Christ begs you to begin to live it now. " The Christian religion," says Harnack, " means one thing, and one thing only : eternal life in the midst of time, by the strength and under the eyes of God."

Apparently it is not easy for a generation to focus both these aspects ; one or other becomes blurred and dim. Formerly it was the thought of the endless future reaching out and out and still out, until Time itself was a faint memory of what once was somewhere in the illimitable wastes behind us—wastes which will always

be the merest fraction, too minute to calculate, of what still lies before—that stirred men's minds, and gripped their hearts, and haunted them. And surely little wonder!

What an immense force of appeal lies in all that for ages who believe in it! For who would be such a colossal fool as to give up his thoughts and strength to the few years that we have here, if he really believed that, all that quickly over, with his poor pleasure-house laid flat by a wind out of the darkness, with all his brief dreams gone and his narrow ambitions left behind, empty-handed, empty-hearted, empty-souled, with life done and nothing left to show for it, he must somehow face a whole Eternity, a whole Eternity, a whole Eternity! Or who would fear the rough wind in his face, even though it do cut, and catch away the breath, if he believed that, this short trial ended, he will burst through to the glory of Eternal Life?

But in our day that side of things has dimmed. People are back again at Rabelais' "huge perhaps." Is there another world, and do we survive death? First it was hell that went, as a crude notion of an outgrown age. For our God is not Love, but a flabby good nature; nor is He holy, but weakly indulgent, smuggling us somehow through. And now Heaven, too, is gone. For Dean Inge is entirely accurate when he says bluntly that your decent man outside of the church looks with suspicion on your talk of heaven, as at a cheque drawn on a bank, the solvency of which he gravely doubts. Give him hard cash down, something tangible and here and now. He is not interested in much else. So utterly parochial-minded have we grown, so earth-bound, so material even in our dreams! They tell us ants are born with wings and use them, know the

glory and flame and rapture of flight, and that they tear them off deliberately, and live their whole lives through as crawling insects—choosing that, they to whom God gave the whole vast empire of the air. So have we, immortal spirits, cribbed and cabined and confined ourselves to this poor dust-speck of a world, marooned ourselves on this islet of time, we, born and fashioned for Eternal Life.

Yet even so, even supposing that you are not sure of immortality, you do not evade Christ. For, after all, Eternity is not really endless Time, but something altogether different from Time; and, in essence, Life Eternal has to do, not with duration, but with the manner in which it is lived. As Percy Gardner put it aptly, Christ speaks of it not in the present or the future, but "the mystic tense." People can live it here, can use it now. "If you would enter into life," said Christ to that youth to whom His heart went out, "keep the commandments." "To be spiritually minded," says Paul, that "is life." Live in sin, and all that is noblest and highest in one droops and dies, as Burns discovered sadly from his own experience—"It hardens a' within, and petrifies the feelings." Forget the big realities, and, as fish in the depths of the ocean have let their eyes atrophy through lack of use, so that now they cannot see, are blind and dark and shut into a little world, so will our folly disinherit us. But live for spiritual things, believe in the great dreams, put life to high unselfish uses, and we have entered into life which is life indeed, as vastly richer and more interesting than the poor thing we knew as if a dozen senses had been added suddenly to our equipment, and now teeming interests came crowding in amazingly out of nowhere, which is indeed a petty metaphor for it. "Whoso

believeth," says Christ, "hath Eternal Life." Whoever lives in view of the great facts for which I stand will use his life in a new way. For that environment will tell on him and colour all his thoughts and deeds and character, instinctively, unconsciously, so that he could no more live the worldling's tame and shabby life than a European, with the glories of the life of Europe setting him a standard, could sink to the level of the savage, or endure the days with which the latter is content. "This," says John, "is life eternal, to know God"—God as we see Him in the face of Jesus Christ. For to know God is to see life as He lives it. And with that there rushes in upon us what our own should be—that same life, lived in the same way, within the limits of our human nature, as a great country can be reproduced feature by feature on a map no more than six feet long. As at the Renaissance men's minds were entirely changed by the astronomical discovery that the earth is not alone, with the heavens revolving far above it, but that it is in heaven, a part of it, so in the Testament men found that Time is an illusion and that this that we know now is a part of Eternity. And grasping that, they learned to live their life in a new way, the heavenly, the eternal way; saw that our fashions here, so customary and engrained that we would think anything else unusual or clean impossible, are really only the petty habits of a small tribe out of the current; that selfishness and self-indulgence are mere provincialisms, as parochial as the uncouth accent of some small country town; that unselfishness and using life for others and all these claims on us of Christ, which seem to us so odd, are the established customs of Eternity. And with that they began to practise them, not perfectly, but they kept growing better and better at it; learned to

live life in God's way—cleanly, unselfishly, lovingly, generously. That is to live. And to do anything else with one's life is to lose it, to throw it away, to waste it, to allow it to lie and rust.

But with that the Testament turns things round again, shows us the other side once more. For while Eternal Life is present, it is not yet in us at its fullest. They can speak of it as here, but often they look forward to it as to something coming as a huge reward, or as a goal to which one may attain. And that means, does it not, that we are back again where one finds oneself so constantly in the New Testament, at that happy feeling that one is never at the end of Christ, that always there is more and better still to follow, still to be appropriated, still to be enjoyed in Him—that, as the Persian poet put it, God always lives in the spring with the whole summer opening before Him and His folk. So in the Testament these people felt that even though they had already received from Christ what makes all the difference between death and life, still what they had as yet was nothing to what they felt sure they would keep gaining from Him. The brook becomes a stream, and the stream widens to a river, and the river, miles broad now, loses itself in the infinite sea. The infant grows into a child, and the child into a youth, and the youth into a man. And we too shall grow up in Christ, and then, what then? Already, blessed be His name, we are the sons of God. But what we shall be, when our hearts have opened to the fulness of His gifts—who can think out, or dream, or faintly picture that? "One thing we know," says John, quite simply, as if stating an obvious fact, "we shall be like Him." But for the rest, what can one do but fall back upon Buddha? It is the ideal, the Best of which the mind can think, which

begins here, but widens into something fuller, richer, better, into the Best possible, upon the other side. That then is what He offers. And are your eyes still straying to the world's tawdry prizes, and the poor tinselled vulgarities? Take care lest, as He looks at you too, Christ's eyes blaze into contempt. "Thou fool!"

VII.

THE MESSAGE OF JESUS THE LAYMAN.

"And when they had performed all things according to the law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee, to their own city Nazareth. And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom: and the grace of God was upon him. And He went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and was subject unto them: but His mother kept all these sayings in her heart. And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man."—LUKE ii. 39–40, 51–52.

STEVENSON once wrote Henley a charming letter in which he pretends to have come upon some unknown works by the great masters—a new novel of Fielding, and the like, and tells how he feels that he would rush first, with a kind of fever of excitement, at a Journal kept by Shakespeare. But what literary might-have-been, if it could come true, would so move us as the discovery of some authentic record of the lost years of Jesus Christ? Once, we read, He stooped and traced something with His finger in the dust, and the next swirl down the street blotted out for ever the only words, so far as we hear, He ever wrote. We too would like to have seen them, with the others, to have been impressed and shamed by them, as they all were. But they are gone! And what a prodigal waste it seems that whole thirty years of our Lord's life, every hour of it full of Himself, are obliterated almost as utterly! No doubt the little bunch of

primroses clutched in a child's hot hand does give us some idea of what the woods are like in spring; and we have vastly more than that, can never be too grateful that in the providence of God so much has been preserved. And yet it seems such niggardly treatment to offer us only these few incidents of these few final years out of all the largesse of Christ's words and deeds, day after day, month after month, year after year.

Luke tells us that he took pains to gather tales and reminiscences of the Master, and rich treasure-trove he found. What do we not owe to the old body—was it?—who had heard Christ speaking on the prodigal, and happily remembered it with vivid exactness till Luke, feeling this was the very best on which he had yet stumbled, set it all down in the very centre of his picture, where the light falls full upon it? But why did he never find, or make, occasion to journey to Nazareth? And were there no folk left who could have told him about the Child who grew up from a toddler in the same narrow street, whom they had often carried in their arms, who had lived, their close neighbour, just across the road, for half a lifetime; no friend of His mother's who was wont to drop in to the home, or no school comrade who many a day had roamed the hills with Him in summer? Think what it would have meant to the children to have had chapters of stories of their Lord when He was tiny like themselves, when He too was sent off to bed when the time came although He was not one bit sleepy, when He too had lessons, and there were messages to run, when He was living their own life with their very difficulties—and perhaps none are harder or more real, from life's start to its close, than those of a sensitive child. Like a mother who has lost her baby, and throughout the after-years keeps

dreaming what he would be like now if he had lived, so the Church has tried to think itself back into those silent years, and picture Him as He was then, sometimes only with grotesque results, as in the Apocryphal Gospels, sometimes more happily, like Francis Thompson :

> " Little Jesus, wast Thou shy
> Once, and just so small as I ?
> . . . . . .
> Didst Thou kneel at night to pray,
> And didst Thou join Thy hands, this way ?
> And did they tire sometimes, being young,
> And make the prayer seem very long ?
> . . . . . .
> And did Thy Mother at the night
> Kiss Thee, and fold the clothes in right ?
> And didst Thou feel quite good in bed,
> Kissed, and sweet, and Thy prayers said ? "

But it is all only imagination, and one is never sure where reverence ends. Or was there no one to tell them of how He bore Himself in an ordinary life like ours, how He with His clever fingers undid the tangles that so puzzle us ; how He carried His soul evenly, spilling no drop of all God's will for Him, through the press and jostle of the streets ; what He did about unreasonable customers, when they lost their temper about nothing at all ; and how He managed concerning the other carpenter with his workshop not far off ; and all the teasing problems about business competition and the like that so fret and worry loyal souls eager to follow closely in His steps ? If we had seen Him at it, surely it would have been easier for us, so at least we feel, almost resentfully at times. And what of all that mass of sleepless, eager, ungrudging unselfishness that later swept in such full flood, and which must have been

percolating all those earlier years through endless daily kindnesses into wherever there were tired and sick and sinful folk? It is all lost to us. The beautiful idyll at the start, and then the mists come down, and close thick and impenetrable, break once for an instant in a revealing tale, only to grow denser still. Peer as we may, till our eyes ache, we can see nothing but the wet grey walls; listen with hearts at strain, no sound, however faint, comes through to us. The Silent Years!

True, it is not all mere empty blankness! Nature, one gathers, always meant very much to Him. Paul, like Socrates, was in essence a pure city man, happiest among the rush and dust and pressure of the streets, but our Lord loved the hills; and perhaps it was no new habit, thrust on Him by the busyness of His public life, to slip away for nights of prayer alone there with the august silence of the stars and the hush sleeping in the lonely mountain glens. Nature to Him was full of God; and characteristically what He found in it was the Divine compassion, a huge readiness to forgive and overlook, and an eager abandon of self-sacrificing love, stubborn in goodness even towards those insolent in their deliberate offences. A little bird lying dead upon the road awoke in Him no thoughts of "nature red in tooth and claw," but made Him certain that God had been there beside His tiny creature in its hour of need. But the birds always fascinated Him, flitting so unafraid through this great, dangerous world; and it is likely it was ever so with Him. Indeed, as in Carlyle's early notebooks, one comes with delight on jottings of thoughts which, later, grew into the most characteristic of his pages, so, was there a day when, on the hills overlooking Nazareth, He saw the sunshine

lying full and golden on the croft of some impudent blasphemer, or the rain falling healingly on the parched land of a notoriously evil liver? Was that night in Jerusalem when, with a sudden gust, it came howling up the alley, rattling the shutters of the room where He talked with Nicodemus, the first time the wind in its mysteriousness had made Him think of God's ways towards His world? And surely it was One who had long loved flowers who stopped short in His sermon that day saying, But why listen to Me? Look at these preachers everywhere about you, who must surely bring it home to the most careworn soul! The fact too that children ran to Him has meaning, for those shrewd little judges give themselves only to certain types of men. But indeed it is emphasized for us that with all classes of folk He was popular, grew up a wise, gracious, sunny laddie, universally liked, as one would have expected; for one cannot think of Christ at all, young or old, in public or in private, except as giving Himself for the people round about Him in a constant joyous unselfishness, living a life in which He Himself had no place, because always there were so many others to think of first that He never occurred to His own mind.

Very impressive and informing is His mother's quite unconscious revelation of what lies so deeply in the shadows of the silent years, when, noticing the whispering among their hosts, she slipped across to her Son, to the One whom she had never known to fail, on whom she could always depend, and then confidently reassured the embarrassed servants, "Don't worry, Jesus knows about it. Whatsoever He says to you, do it! Now that He is aware of it, nobody need fret any further." Do not that instinctive appeal and

utter trust light up for us the hidden life with a queer vividness, give us a whole background of years and years of unfailing kindness, and the picture of One who simply could not keep Himself out of anybody's trouble, had to enter in and share it every time? Carlyle, for his part, refused to believe in the insincerity of the Mohammad of the earlier years, for this as his main reason, that his employer and his slave, those who saw him day by day, believed in him with all their hearts. And Christ emerges from the shadows that lie so thick upon His early life with this testimony —given Him quite unconsciously—that those fierce fires of family life, which throw out into such bold relief the secret writing on our character and soul, had revealed in Him that very same unselfishness and kindliness and grace, that generous ungrudging giving of Himself for others, which later was to put the whole round world so hugely in His debt. The Christ of the hidden years was the Christ we know.

At all events, some things are absolutely sure. This, to begin—that for the greater portion of His life Christ put His passion for righteousness and love of God into the living of an ordinary life like yours and mine, weaving His utter faith and glorious loyalty into the stuff of the common things which we too have to handle; but which, under our clumsy fingers, grow so tangled and so twisted and so broken and marred; that He lived where we have to live, immersed among material things, where many have felt holiness is just a far-off dream, utterly beyond our reach, beautiful but not for us, unless we can somehow withdraw out of this suffocating rush and press and clamour of insistent little duties, necessarily filling the mind to the exclusion of the bigger things. Out of the dust and whirl of life,

we find ourselves looking wistfully at cool and leisured folk who have time to be good-tempered, feeling that if we had their chance we also might climb far nearer to the stars than we stand now. But what hope is there for us, us so breathless and so hot, bustled and tired and fretted, condemned to a low level of spirituality by our lot in life? The business is so small and precarious that it exhausts our energies, or it is growing, and keeps claiming more and more from us. In either case our minds are like that track in the Lord's parable, beaten bare and hard by ceaseless traffic over it, so that, when the seed He sows alights on it, it cannot root, lies there a moment, and then some care or worry, like a swift bird swoops, and it is gone. What with the children and the household duties filling the whole day, or with the pressure of things down at the office or the schoolroom or the shop, God just fades out, and Christ gets overlooked, and nothing can come of it, in our case. And yet Erskine of Linlathen used to wish that, for his soul's sake, his days were fuller of necessary duties, for rightly used, said he, "a settled employment becomes just a settled habit of prayer." Yes, you say, but it is not the busyness, it is that in my case it is all so material. There is something religious about a church and music and incense, but none about a kitchen and the clatter of dishes and a smell of cooking! And it is there I have to live, and there that I must serve, if anywhere at all! And Brother Lawrence did it; declared he felt as close to God with the kitchen fire burning his face, rushed and bustled, with several calling for different things, and all at once, as at the Blessed Sacrament. But it is all so petty! And yet littleness does not cut one off from God; there is a queer homeliness about Him, for all His unthinkable

majesty, that makes it possible to talk to Him about small nothings we would never mention to any one else. As Smetham has it, "Christ is the only one who never expects you to be other than yourself: He takes your view of things and mentions no other: He takes the old woman's view of things and has a great interest in washpowder; Sir Isaac Newton's view of things and wings among the stars with him; the artist's view and feeds among the lilies; the lawyer's, and shares the justice of things with him: but He never plays the lawyer or the philosopher to the artist or the old woman. He is above that littleness." You see to Him it is not petty, because it touches you. In any case, beyond question, it was in a busy life like ours that Jesus walked with God, days filled with many a duty in the workshop and the home that He consecrated as none others ever were, amid our surroundings and out of chances like our own that He fashioned a character that stands in human records unique and alone. No doubt it is difficult. But then Christ knows how difficult it is, and offers us the very grace that has been proved sufficient where we need it.

Perhaps that hidden life was, in its way, the vastest of all His achievements. There are no more moving pages in literature than those in which Carlyle communed with himself in his Diary after the manuscript of the *Revolution* had been burned, and the letter in which Samuel Johnson announced that he had had a stroke, and Milton's glorious sonnet on his blindness. The mind stands to its feet, as it reads, in sheer reverence. Nothing could be more perfect than the way in which these heroic souls faced the great crashing catastrophes of life; yet with the daily frets and worries they were not nearly so successful. Does not Frederic Harrison remind us

that the cocks in Cheyne Row were the size of ostriches, and crew with the noise of a steam hammer, so it seemed ? " It is not the dying for a faith," cries Dick Steele in *Esmond*, " it is the living it, that is so hard." To do great things that we know matter and will tell, to pull ourselves together and be true at the crises we can see are crises—is that so difficult as to be faithful in the individual little nothings that make up our common days, as patiently to weave our religion out of them, one little thread after one little thread, as John says the saints do, for is not their righteousness like linen clean and white ? As that mighty scholar, A. B. Davidson, once said : " To live an ordinary life well is the greatest of all deeds. To utter noble thoughts at a time, to do great actions in the heat of emulation and on the field— that is less severe. To do well the common things of life, to do them always well—that is hardest." And that surely is the record of the silent years.

Again, this seems clear, that our Lord must have put much of His service of God and of His love to Him into the thoroughness with which He sawed and planed and laboured at His ordinary humdrum daily task. Justin Martyr tells us that in his day there were still implements in existence said to have come from Christ's own hands. One can be sure that His whole heart had been put into the making of them, that to every customer He gave His very best, as He stood there among the clean, sweet-smelling shavings, working at cradles and at biers, those symbols of the mysteries and deeps of life, and at the little homely things no less. Well may the Moravians pray in their litany, " May the precious sweat of Thy labour lighten our toil," and again, " May Thy faithfulness in Thy handicraft make us faithful in our share of labour." For, though one would have

thought that Christ's touch upon common work would have sanctified and ennobled it in all Christian eyes, is anything more obvious to-day than the contempt in which we hold it? We count it a mere drudgery that must be borne, and put it through grudgingly with many a straying glance at the clock, until the wished-for Saturday afternoon slowly comes round, and then, that wearisome necessity safely over for another week, real life, to be called life, at long last begins. Partly, no doubt, that is due to the present industrial system, which, reducing men to mere machines, has robbed them of the artist's joy and glory in his labour. Partly it is sheer irreligion, sheer forgetfulness that, as Carlyle kept reiterating, all work, even the lowliest, is worship; that, as Paul put it to the slaves sick of their drab, monotonous, uninteresting life, it is God Himself we serve; that we too, wherever be our sphere, are His ministers no less than those who stand before His altars; and that it is an impudent profanity to offer Him less than our very best. Yet we keep doing it. Ruskin was once allowed to climb up in a great cathedral to examine certain capitals, lost in the dark and dust of centuries, and found to his delight that the traceries there, which can never have been seen by human eye since they were finished and the scaffolding was taken down, were no less delicate and perfect than those in full sight of the staring congregation. Mr. Grayson has a pretty story of a village carpenter who kept adding touch to touch at part of a bit of furniture completely hidden? "Why do you bother so?" they asked, "no one will ever know." "I will know," the man answered. And God too knows. And the fact that we can scamp work, that we pull ourselves yawningly through our working hours, that we drop our tools the moment that the whistle

sounds, is clear proof that we are an irreligious age, who do not feel God's presence where we have to spend most of our life, in the kitchen or the office or the study or the yard, where for us religion, if we are ever to attain to it, must be worked out. Nor will we ever be religious in a great part of our mind and days till, as the Apocrypha puts it, each of us in his own station offers his work as a prayer, and does it as an act of worship, face to face with God, as be sure the Carpenter of Nazareth did, day by day, and hour by hour. Paul several times uses with marked disapproval a word translated "disorderly." But the papyri show, so scholars say, that it was the term in current use denoting an idle apprentice and the like. Laziness and half-heartedness in work are in the New Testament a sin.

And there is this too—is there not?—that for years and years Christ waited with His heart on fire to save the world, and sure that He could do it; waited till the young ones had grown up and the mother could be left with them; waited—and then James joined a strict religious order and that meant more delay—waited without a thought of vexed repining, content to spend Himself on the little things that God had laid upon Him; and not until these had all been put through did He feel free to turn to His tremendous dream; till then gave all the glory of His mind and soul and nature to what it seems so many others might have done, while the whole uneasy, sin-sick, desperate world waited for Him. You also, perhaps, have your visions, very fair and stately, and you fret and chafe because you are chained down to such an unimpressive life that does not seem to matter much, feel you are being lost, that God is not making anything like the most of you, that your eager faith and zeal are being allowed unaccount-

ably to run to waste. You yearn for the mission field, where workers are so needed; and here are you longing to go, and, instead, you have to spend your days upon some invalid's fractious whims and fancies. You know you have it in you to cut out a career, but are condemned to some unexciting drudgery. Well, it is trying. Yet Standfast tells us that whenever he saw the print of His Lord's shoe, therein he coveted to set his own: and nothing more is being asked of you—how infinitely less—than Christ gave nearly all His days, the Christ who was so absolutely content with God's ordering of His life, that, as Browning has it:

> "He even seeketh not to please God more
> (Which meaneth, otherwise) than as God please."

It is not the amount of the offering, but the spirit of it, that is all-important. And, after all, one never knows which is the big life, which the small. Be sure it was a disappointed soul who, with his eager offer of service rejected, went back to his own house; yet, when our Lord next appeared in that countryside, the man's quiet daily witness, which he had thought so unimportant, was found to have told enormously. And it was not only when Christ climbed Calvary to die for us that He pleased God perfectly. But to Him, all the silent years, the one thing absolutely beautiful and glorious in His whole marvellous world was that life with its little duties, hidden away in some back street.

Further, the message of Christ, and the form in which He put it, become increasingly impressive when we remember that in essentials His age was quite curiously like our own. There was, for example, the same overpopulation, with the difficulties and the ills, social and economic, that arise from that. Nothing is more

striking in the background of the Gospels than the speed with which, at a moment's notice, a crowd gathers, leaping out of nowhere. Josephus tells us how incredibly large was the number of crofters drawing meagrely some kind of pinched existence from the soil, no foot of which was left uncultivated : and how continuous was the chain of endless towns with huge masses of poor creatures herded into the slums ; and how innumerable were the villages, if you can give that name to townships in the very least of which he says that there were not a few thousands of souls. It was a teeming land, and the taxation was stupendous, and the pinch of things so sore that the people had grown soured and desperate, filling the country with a constant snarl and bickering of acute, raw discontent, which, let Rome stamp on it with its ironshod heel how it might, till every spark seemed out, kept quickly winking itself back into a roaring fire again. They were so wholly engaged in the effort to make things just meet that they had no time for religion, pushed it from them pettishly, clamoured for something that would meet their grievances and right their wrongs, not put them vaguely off with future hopes and thin and insubstantial promises. Nazareth was no petty hamlet drowsing in its sleepy hollow, far from the madding crowd, and from the bitter problems of our age ; but there too were the surge and the heave and the unrest of desperate hearts, and to dismiss Christian ethics as suited for a half-somnolent world, but out of place and date in our rushed life and problems is mere silliness. In those alleys too there were people angry and sullen and all on edge with patent wrongs, because they had no fair share in the world, and because, like a sickly plant in a slum window-box which never sees the sun, their life

spent all its energy in keeping life alive, could never flower, knew nothing of the glory it should have; people who felt that only force or some revolutionary upheaval could meet the case.

And to-day is not the Church faced by a situation curiously similar? And are not the more ardent spirits giving themselves to an agonized endeavour to rouse those who name Christ's name to help in the upsetting and reforming of the whole environment in which the masses have to live? And who can wonder! For to exist in this distressful world, unmoved by all the hopelessness and miseries in which so many of our fellows start and spend and end their days, handicapped from their birth, and pursued by innumerable difficulties hour by hour, were to play the sorry part of the priest and the Levite, who awoke Christ's scorn.

And yet—and yet—He, living in an age like ours, declared with emphasis that it is we ourselves who are the cause of the worst difficulties for ourselves and others, we ourselves who must be changed if there is ever to be a new world; and if we fail to put the stress there, we are preaching some new gospel, and not Christ's. For Him it would have been so easy to have won flocks of adherents had He preached what they desired, what seemed to them the things of first importance. But He would not, and they turned away disgusted, as from a mere dreamer mouthing words, and left Him quite alone. And we too must not, for the sake of winning popularity for Christ, allow ourselves to forget to cry, as He cried, that no economic change will solve the problem, and no revolution cleanse the world; that, as Herbert Spencer put it, "no alchemy can produce golden conduct out of leaden motives"; that man does not live by bread alone, and that all

hopes, however splendid in their daring, and however chivalrously championed, that do not end in personal holiness and the unselfishness of Christ in us, will fade in disillusionment and heartbreak, and the old old problem be left still unsolved. As Francis Thompson has it :

> "There is no expeditious road
> To pack and label men for God,
> And save them by the barrel load."

But you and I must one by one become new creatures and put on Christ's ways.

Finally, there is this to say—that the teaching of Jesus Christ is not just words and guesses thrown into the air. It is a reading of life, His own life, of these thirty unknown years : it is the fruit of His experience there in the home and streets of Nazareth : it is what He Himself had found in His own personal walk with God. If He is so sure that if we ask we shall receive, and if we seek shall find, it is because He Himself had asked so often and had never known God fail Him ; if to Him worry seems a foolish thing and almost unbelievable, it is because day after day He had experienced that we are all surrounded by a grace that never sleeps, nor fails, but extricates us, in ways unimaginable, out of our most desperate plights, and can be safely trusted. And, surely, when the world is filled with gloomy readings of this life of ours, when men like Thomas Hardy see so little in it except grey, sunless days and starless nights, and even Shakespeare falls into a sour melancholy over all the mysteries that baffle and bewilder him, it is a glorious fact that the deepest mind, the clearest soul, the greatest human being this world ever saw, when He looked back over life as He knew it there in Nazareth, gives us a reading of it all so hearten-

ing, so gracious, so full of the splendour of God's love, so absolutely certain of it, that the crowding difficulties, disappointments heartbreaks of His public life, the dreadful storms that burst on Him never shook down His sunny faith, so very glorious that to this day men call it the good news, and faces clear and hearts grow brave and cheerful at the merest echo of it.

VIII.

WHAT WE MEAN TO JESUS CHRIST.

"You have not chosen Me, it is I who have chosen you."—JOHN XV. 16 (MOFFATT).

THIS is one of those amazing passages, of which there are many in the Gospels, upon which nobody, surely, can come even for the thousandth time without a gasp of an astonishment that never passes, at being forced to see how much we mean to Jesus Christ. When we think about such matters, naturally our minds dwell in a stunned way upon all that He is to us; recognizing, with a gush of gratitude, how all the real gladnesses in life run back to Him, or are made far more vivid by Him: moved to note how bleached, in comparison with what it is, our life would be, if we had never known Him; try sometimes, futilely enough, to reckon up something of what we owe Him, and soon stand gazing in bewilderment at the mighty sum of it, yet feeling like the poet, who keeps throwing in more and yet more, ever bigger and more impossible things, always remembering something else, and hurrying to add it, "Yes, and there is this, and this, and this," he says, and sits down at the end of every verse in a hopeless kind of fashion, tired out, yet knowing that he has hardly begun his task, "When Thou hast done, Thou hast not done: for I have more." And it takes us aback

to hear Christ tell us over and over that in all He does for us He is not merely moved by pity for poor creatures ; that He acts, not simply out of philanthropy and charity, though of course there is that in it—is it not grace, what is given away because it cannot be earned ? —but that His heart runs out to us because He finds that there is some real kinship between Him and us, because with us He has a comfortable feeling that He is at home, because it matters to Him to have us there beside Him, even because if He helps us, we also can help Him ! " St. Francis," says Mr. Chesterton, " was a lover of God, and he was really and truly a lover of men ; possibly a much rarer mystical vocation. A lover of men is very nearly the opposite of a philanthropist," who " may be said to love anthropoids. St. Francis did not love humanity but men." And you must try to take it in that Christ loves you because He finds something lovable in you.

I have long ago ceased even to try to understand that ! No doubt it is always the generous fashion of love, that magnificent spendthrift, to fling itself away upon unworthiness, to stoop to bless. But this is such an astounding instance of it ! For what possible kinship can there be between Christ, so clean and strong, and us, so selfish and so earthy-minded and so soiled ! Tennyson, musing on his dead friend, thinks there is little likelihood that they can ever renew the old intimacy, feels in some moods it is out of the question and stupid to imagine it ; for, while he himself lingers here, that other, so early promoted, has moved on through what marvellous experiences, and must always be a whole lifetime ahead in soul development. And what conceivable attraction can there be to Jesus Christ in crude things like us lagging so far behind Him ?

He might fling His largesse to us in our beggary, and so pass on; but to expect more, surely, were unseemly irreverence. Yet there it stands. "Ye have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you." He picked us out; He likes to have us with Him; He is disappointed that we do not see how intimate and close He wishes the relationship between Himself and us to be! I call you not servants, He says, because you are not servants, and I have never treated you as such, but with all frankness, opening My heart to you whom I can trust, sure of your loyalty and understanding, giving you My friendship, as I ask yours from you. If any one is Christ's at all, to him too belongs that wonderful title, "the disciple whom Jesus loved."

In the days of His flesh, as Dr. John Brown said, He showed a marked capacity for personal friendships. That indeed is carried to startling lengths. He lived surrounded by a circle of men who were very much to Him, and this not merely that He might teach and train them, but because He liked to have them there; dwelt indeed in a strangely close communion with them difficult to understand. For in the great moments of our life, when we are face to face with God, we have to be alone; the footstep even of our dearest would break the spell, would hurl us back sharply and suddenly to earth again.

> "The solemn peaks but to the stars are known,
> But to the stars, and the cold lunar beams:
> Alone the sun arises, and alone
> Spring the great streams."

But it was not so with Jesus Christ, who in the tensest moments, and in even His most intimate communion with His Father, chose to have some of His friends beside Him, felt that their presence there, and their uncouth

fumbling sympathy, did not jar, but that it helped. And yet they were so queer a little company, these men so dear to Jesus Christ! How often they misrepresented Him! Yet He was never fretted into temper toward them. How dull and material in the make-up of their minds they were—even after the Resurrection, we are told, they were asking hopefully about some earthly monarchy on which their hearts still ran. Yet He never struck His hands together in a sudden flash of anger; His patience, long worn, at last fairly broken through, crying with heat, or in despair, "Away back to your homes, you who have not a touch of spirituality in your whole composition, who will not see, and are too dense ever to understand!" Often enough as we read, with our faces flushing at the poor show they are making, we watch for some such outburst. But it never comes; nor did it ever enter Christ's mind so to judge them. What struck Him was their loyalty, and the risks that they were running for Him, and how much He owed them for the difference that their friendship had made. They trooped into the upper room, like sulky children; upon the road they had been arguing angrily within earshot of Christ, who had the biggest claim upon Him, who had made the heaviest sacrifices upon His behalf, and stormy voices raised unguardedly had reached Him clearly. "You on the right hand and the left hand, indeed! And why you? You and your tarry bits of boats! And what about the business that I left, worth ten of yours?" Yet when He prayed for them, it was not a desperate cry for forgiveness that He offered. He thanked God for them, looked at them very lovingly, told them how grateful He was, and would always be, for all that they had been to Him, these men, as He said, proud of them, who had stood by Him in all His

temptations ; and had helped Him, far more than they knew, by their sympathy and faith.

And we must make shift somehow to try at least to grasp that it is somewhat so that He thinks about you and me, who to ourselves seem the most hopeless of bunglers in this whole adventure, and the most arrantly disloyal of hearts, causing Him endless trouble ; till we sometimes feel that, for His own sake, He should drop us, and not handicap His cause by such obvious failures as us any longer. Yet, somehow, it appears that He has no such feeling ; no intention of dismissing us. "I chose you," He said ; "and I did it, knowing what you are ; and I do not repent of it, stand by you ; grateful for the difference that you have made to Me, and all the help that you have given." That surely hurts us more than the sharpest reproof could do ! And yet, as sometimes Christ liked to escape out of Jerusalem with its cold, hostile eyes and its critical minds and its eager misunderstanding of all that He said and did, and make His way to Bethany ; and when the roof of one familiar house rose into sight, still more when He passed through its archway into the quiet of its courtyard, and the heavy door swung to behind Him, and the babble of the world was all shut out, and He was there alone with those who loved Him, and believed in Him, and partly at least understood Him, so is it that He feels when He looks at you, with just such a happy little sigh of relief. You also rest Him, and refresh His heart. For even yet in the world He is a lonely and unpopular Figure but little desired, and to whom few give any entrance. He stands and knocks. But they are busy, and do not hear ; or they look out, and seeing who it is, turn away, for they do not want Him ; or perhaps they propose to open the door some-

time, but cannot be bothered doing it now. Meanwhile He stands without, disregarded, unaccepted, and ignored! But when He sees you, His face lightens. "For here is one of My own folk," He says, "who understands Me, and believes in Me, and loves Me: he will surely give Me welcome, with him I will be at home." It is a poor, bare, untidy heart, not worthy of Him, into which we usher Him shamefacedly enough; and yet He accepts our meagre hospitality with eagerness, for He, the most divine of givers, was ever touched, and taken aback, and frankly grateful when any petty gift was offered Him.

> "God who registers the cup
> Of mere cold water, for His sake
> To a disciple rendered up,
> Disdains not His own thirst to slake
> At the poorest love was ever offered."

So do our broken bits of faith help Jesus Christ, so much do we mean to Him, even you, and even I!

Further, there is this wonderful thing, that neither God nor Christ has kept the saving of the world in His own hands. Our Lord has been graciously pleased—and it is like Him to have done it—to throw Himself upon our loyalty, to allow us, too, to have a real part in it all. Whole-heartedly He made Himself dependent on these twelve; all His plans were built up upon their faithfulness as a foundation. If it went, everything would rumble down, and the faith soon be a vague rumour dying into utter silence. Is there not a bonnie legend that, when He won back to heaven, the adoring angels, looking doubtfully at that scared group of broken men, asked Him what further precautions He had taken for the saving of the world, and He replied that, under God, He had made none; was certain

nothing more was needed. And in our day it is on us that He leans so confidently, from our hands that He stoops to accept. Look at "the hope of your calling!" Paul exclaims. Be sure that it is not for nothing, that there is a high purpose and some honouring plan in it! And this surely is not the least of that, that Christ believes—our call is there to prove it—that we can do something for Him that no one else can do, that in His need He turns and looks toward us. That, surely, is almost the greatest of His kindnesses! Many a man has been surprised into doing bigger things than would ever have been possible for him by some teacher's unexpected faith in his abilities, which nobody had ever seen before or so much as suspected, and least of all the man himself, who had come to regard himself as a poor creature, glad if he could shuffle through life decently. But, with this unexpected hope in him to spur it, his mind suddenly leapt forward and did unbelievably. And Christ has chosen us to help Him in His saving of the world; is sure that we can do it, is sure also that we will!

Yet are we doing our fair share? Joubert, with his delicate French mind, points out that the word "liberty" has greatly changed its meaning with the years, that whereas now to be free means to be independent, in ancient times to be free meant to have a real share in the governing and carrying on of the state. And in the Testament the Christian freeman is not merely one who has received a signal benefit, though that is everywhere underlined, but—and this too is emphasized as heavily—one who has shouldered grave and staggering responsibilities. There is no selfishness in real religion; and accordingly the moment one receives the benefit one has to hand it on. "It was in those who had recovered

from the plague," says Thucydides, "that the sick and the dying found most compassion." And you can calculate with accuracy the value that you set on Christ by the eagerness with which you are endeavouring to share Him with others. Once we are Christ's, we have entered a kingdom, have become members of a state (is not this at least some of the meaning that lies behind one of our Lord's most common metaphors?), and we should feel the thrill of that, which ought to act upon us much as patriotism does. Henceforth this kingdom's interests are our interests; what touches it touches our hearts, and we must be ready at need to work for it, live for it, die for it. I wonder, do we realize that adequately? We take greedily from Jesus Christ, but are we giving to Him all we can?

During the war the hoardings, you remember, were covered with a portrait of Lord Kitchener with pointing finger, and the call "Your King and Country need you." And every man passing along the streets felt the stab of that, as if it were a personal appeal, as if that finger pointed straight at him and him alone; and so they flocked to the recruiting offices in crowds, admitting that the plea was just, that they owed everything to this old land, and that now that it was in danger—"Look! here is my poor body, given willingly to buttress it up so far as it can!" And they did it proudly. And this King and Kingdom also need us, look to us, make appeal to us, trust us. Does that leave us cold? Shall we not fling ourselves into the struggle, touched, honoured, proud as we are proud of nothing else in the whole world, that Christ should stoop to be beholden to us, us who have failed Him so often, but in whom He still undauntedly and daringly believes?

For, lastly, there is this about it all, that Christ's

heart has not tired of you, nor turned from you, whatever you have done, and however tashed your record may be. "Having loved His own that were in the world, He loved them unto the end," protests the author of the Fourth Gospel, realizing that such a persistency of grace towards such impossible people as he was describing was fast becoming altogether incredible. He cannot explain it; but he holds to it doggedly, that, though we may not believe him, it was really so. They did not tire Him out; but, where their sin abounded, His grace proved yet more abundant, and it overcame. No strain that they could put on it could make it snap or give. He chose us; and having seen the worst in us, He stood by us, entirely unrepentant, to the very end! "Him that cometh to Me, I will in no wise cast out." So He said; and so it proved. And the real wonder of that promise lies not so much in the mystery of our initial acceptance, as in the loyalty that bears, and bears with us unto the very end. You can be sure of that, says the Evangelist, look at this case! And indeed it is immensely reassuring. After three years of these troublesome folk He still so loved them, that plainly He could hardly tear Himself away from them—rose up, it seems, to go, turned to the door, and then paused, and looking at them with love in His eyes sat down again, to give them yet one other and last word. "I go to prepare a place for you, that where I am there ye may be also," He had said, no doubt at all on their behalf; and yet may there not have been this in it also, that Christ, looking round upon these hearts that had stood by Him, said, with eager expectation upon His side too, "A little while, and we shall be with one another again, you and I, and yonder what shall we not do together, you whom I have proved, and I whom you

have learned to trust"? At all events, almost Christ's one prayer for Himself that day, almost the one reward that He asked for Himself, was that His friends might be with Him yonder too. Or, think of that scene with Peter by the Lake; how, undismayed by his so recent and so ghastly failure, He whole-heartedly put His cause into his keeping, left it in his hands unafraid. "Feed My lambs; feed My sheep." Is there not something awesome in so obstinate a faith in those who had blundered so often, and so inexcusably? As Dora Greenwell puts it, summing up the message of Christ's life, the secret of His power:

> "It tells of rude disgrace,
> And of an anguished face
> It tells, methinks, and of a wounded friend;
> Of pain it tells, and shame;
> And love that overcame
> By simple skill of loving to the end."

And it is so He thinks of you and me: so that He bears Himself toward us, even after the disgraceful, disappointing past! I knew a splendid lad out at the front who, through illness, made a serious slip, and was court-martialled and punished. The colonel's only comment when he returned from leave, was that he was much too good a boy to be allowed to break; that the fault, being paid for, was now wiped out from his mind, and that he for one would never mention the thing to the lad, or anybody else. Nor did he: slipped at once into the old friendly relations, till the boy, who had sat white-faced waiting for the storm, being dismissed, asked what it meant. "He says that you are far too good a lad to allow snap," I said, "and that it is every one's business now to let you see that you are absolutely trusted by us all." On which he looked a

moment, and turned abruptly away. A few weeks later, placed in a position of danger and authority, the same in which he had failed, he carried himself with such daring and distinction as to win promotion for gallantry on the field, and other honours too. "What could I do?" he said. "I failed him, and he trusted me."

We too have failed Christ badly, and He trusts us still. Are we, too, big enough to feel the thrill and call of that?

When Rainy was dying, he managed to whisper, "I wonder at the love of God to me, as He has shown it all my life. And I believe that, notwithstanding all my shortcomings, I am not shut out, but—shut in." Such is our happy faith. How marvellous it is! For who could wonder or object if, after all His kindness and our gross misuse of it, Christ should look at us coldly, and, angrily resenting the effrontery of our appearance there, say curtly that He did not know us, and with that slam to the door. And yet in point of fact when you or I arrive, so we believe, a sorry enough figure, travel-stained and spent and shabby, He will come to meet us eagerly, and draw us to His Father, and acknowledge us with pride before the most High God. "Father, this is a dear and loyal friend of Mine, whose faith has often helped Me, and in whose love I have often rested." So He assures us it will be at last. But why? you say. I do not know. But how? I cannot tell. Then wherefore are you sure of it, since you confess it is unreasonable to expect it? To which there is only one answer, meaningless to those who do not know Him, but enough for those who do. We know it, because He is Jesus Christ.

IX.

THE CROWNING ATTRIBUTE OF GOD.

"If we disown Him, He also will disown us; and even if our faith fails, He remains true—He cannot prove false to Himself."—2 Tim. ii. 12–13 (Weymouth).

WE can, we often do, act at times more or less out of character, in a way that on the stage would strike playgoers as improbable in the extreme. But in real life anything may happen, and these natures of ours have no fixed geography as yet, are like a world still only half-solidified, subject to unexpected cataclysms and upheavals. A quiet countryside, that has dozed drowsily for centuries, may reel under an earthquake shock; amid the snows and thick-ribbed ice of Arctic lands there may appear, incongruously, a wide lava torrent, boiling and seething. And in the most unlikely people ugly sins and smallnesses may suddenly show through, and hot passions that had never been suspected blaze up in hungry flames, leaving us gaping at a thing incredible. To our bitter cost we all know how, when we are tired and rushed and put about, sometimes for no discernible reason whatsoever, we are not ourselves, as people put it charitably, yet with absolute truth; are peevish and crabbed, do not know why we are so cross and touchy, and yet cannot get back into the accustomed ruts in which we travel, as

a rule, smoothly enough, but go bumping and jolting through a horrid day till we come to ourselves again, as our Lord has it. No one of us surely but must sympathize with Mr. Jerome, when he plaintively exclaims with much self-pity, really I am a decent, kindly, likeable soul, only there is another horrid fellow with repulsive ways, who "will come at times and sit in my clothes; uses my name, and gets mistaken for me." In all of us there is a queer element of unexpectedness, the erratic eccentricities of which can never be foretold. The pattern of our character does not run through the web from end to end, but breaks off suddenly and in the oddest ways into some other, here and there, that clashes with it noisily. We never can be quite sure of ourselves; at any moment may act out of harmony with the whole architecture of our nature, like that strange break-away-from-plan in Ripon Cathedral, or like a river that has burst its banks, and goes roaring, not in its real bed at all.

But, say the Scriptures, the crowning glory of God is that He never acts out of character, and never falls below His best, and cannot be false to His own blessed nature. Which means that if even once you come upon Him with no clouds and darkness round Him to confuse your mind, and blur your vision, and tempt you to imagine things that are not there; if even once you meet Him face to face, then you know what He always is; and can depend upon that absolutely and for ever. And the wonderful thing about Christ is, that as people looked at Him, followed Him, watched Him, burningly it came home to them that this is what God must be like; that, if there be a God at all, then He must have Christ's eyes, Christ's ways, Christ's ever helpful hands, Christ's character; that we can safely argue from this to that

other (for the creature cannot morally out-top the Creator, nor a greater be formed from a less); and this life of our Lord having been lived gives certainty that God must use His too in this same lavishly generous way; He too must be unable to keep out of anybody's trouble; He too must throw in everything He has to help; must give and give and give, eagerly and unreckoningly, for those who seem to have small claim on Him, if any; counting no sacrifice excessive, and no cost too vast, if thereby what was lost be found, and broken things are mended. And do not forget, says Scripture, that what God is, He always is. Stand upon Calvary and try to take this in that, if to-day He loves like that, He always loves like that: yes, even where our hearts become hot and suspicious of Him, soured and bad-tempered toward Him for His ordering of our lives, His crossing of our wishes, His ruthless-looking shattering of our desires.

It is not easy to believe that, and Christ knew that it is not. What was it in Him that first drew you to the Master? "God," says Emerson, "enters by a private door into each individual." And what, I think, attracted me to Him at the beginning was not even His compassion, nor His generosity in judgment, nor His odd faith in hopeless-looking folk, it was His winning honesty; the daring way in which He states the case against Himself and the tenets most dear to Him; putting into words, quite staggering in their boldness, the doubts that hover in the background of our minds, but to which we ourselves would hesitate to give expression. I know, He says, that days will come when this gospel of Mine will seem a mere exasperation, disproved by the hard facts of your life; when your tried hearts will be tempted to hurl it from you impatiently as a thing

visibly untrue. Love, Love! Where is there any trace of loving-kindness in God's way toward me? Is He not rather like a churlish neighbour, who will not bother Himself to give what would cost Him nothing, and make all the difference to me? A Father! Or an unjust Judge, who callously refuses what are my bare dues? Always we can trust Christ to have thought things through, and seen the other side of them; the Christ whose own life was so difficult, and His own faith so tremendous a feat; whose happy creed was no fair-weather thing that a drop or two of rain would smudge and crumple and make run. Carlyle, at times of trial, could not stand what he estimated as the cheap and easy and dishonest optimism of Emerson's mind; thought of him irritably as one standing well up on the beach, out of the spray, chattily throwing a cheery word or two to poor souls wrestling for their very lives in great dark deeps, with thunderous billows knocking the breath out of them. But it was from the darkness round the Cross that there rings out this voice so sure that God is love. Stand there for a moment, and surely you do feel that, there at least, and then, at all events, beyond all doubting God was love. But in Him there are no moods, no caprice, no changeableness. Do what you will to Him, however you may hurt and disappoint and break His heart, you cannot alter His essential nature. After all, in spite of all, through it all, He is still Love, and Love toward you. Look, cries Christ, pointing to a cluster of crofters' huts, high on a sunny slope, there is a man openly irreligious, impudently immoral, yet God's sunshine does not skip his fields! If you have really been at Calvary, and really seen it all with your own eyes, and know it, and are sure of it, then remember that that is not a mood from which He

might pass, but His settled mind toward you; not something outside of God's ordinary life to which He once turned aside, one supreme effort to which He braced Himself, and then fell back upon a lower and more selfish mode of being. It is a sudden revelation of what His divine existence always is. Always to be God means to stoop lower by far than any man could stoop, to bear what never a human heart would dream of bearing, to give oneself with an abandon of unselfishness that leaves us staring at a thing to us almost unbelievable. For, as God's wisdom is not wisdom but omniscience; and His power not power, as we know it, but omnipotence; so His love is a hugeness beyond all human reckoning. It is an everlasting Calvary; as St. Francis saw, when all the sky was filled that day by that tremendous vision of a seraph on a cross, or was it the Lord God Himself? Our mood changes, our emotions cool, for us there come dreary seasons of grey skies and dripping spiritual weather, but God does not change. What we saw Him, He still is. As James puts it very grandly, think of the glory of a midsummer day, in that hushed hour of noon when everything is still, and the sun blazes down in its meridian splendour, till every nook and cranny lies saturated and soaked through and through with warmth and light. Ah! but the sun dips, and the shadows lengthen, and the chill of evening comes, and then the dark. But God's love is a sun that never sets, and never sinks; is always, always, always at its full noonday glory! He can never fall below His best, He cannot be untrue to His own nature.

If we could only be quite sure of that, were always certain of God's Christlikeness, would not a mass of difficulties be as good as over? Plato, you remember,

likened this life of ours to a wild tumbling sea; and tells us that the best that we can do is to knock together, as best we can with our poor numbed fingers, some makeshift raft of speculation; on which, perched precariously, we may make our slow way, wet and miserable and in constant danger, to some kind of land; unless indeed, he adds, there is some surer word of God on which we can ride safely. There is. But, having found it, fools that we are, in rough weather, just when we need it most, we let the blasts and heavy seas sweep us away from it again, and once more we are struggling in stormy waters. Sometimes we are quite sure that God is Love, and then one of the grim facts of life knocks at our door, and our faith wilts and withers, like a wild flower suddenly touched by the scythe's sharpness; or the web of our days grows sad—coloured, and grey, and can it be hands that were pierced for us that weaves this for us, we ask doubtingly; clouds rise from our own frightened minds, and we cry desperately that the sun is out. If only we could take it in that, whenever and wherever God meets us, we are dealing with the heart we see on Calvary; that whatever comes to us, it is He who gave His Son, His best, His all, who sends us this; if facing trouble we could say, with Fraser of Brea, "this is a harsh-featured messenger, yet he comes to me from God, what kindness does he bring me"; if, like Dante, whose sour mind waded intrepidly down to the lowest deeps of hell, because on the gates he had read the tremendous words, "Eternal love made me," we had grasped, in a richer way than he did, that wherever, yes, even in the outer darkness, we come upon God, He is the same God still, still love, still eagerness to help, still all athrill to spend Himself for any confused, blinded, blundering lost soul that will accept it; if, like Festus

in Browning, immersed in life's perplexities, we could take our stand on this as a fixed fact, "God, thou art Love, I build my faith on that," and whatever life may send us, and however our faith gives, would pull ourselves together, saying: But I did climb Calvary, did see with my own eyes; I "know in whom I have believed and am persuaded" that He, who loved me there like that, cannot have grown harsh to me now, would we not face whatever may be coming unafraid, meet it with gallantry and calm?

Yet it is desperately hard not to fall back at times into the foolish notion that God is like ourselves; sometimes better, sometimes worse, kind yesterday no doubt, but strangely forgetful now, inconsistent and incalculable as we are.

For one thing the God whom we see on Calvary is a Holy God; One who loathes evil, to whom it is horrible that stately creatures like us should be soiled by it; and who will make no compromise with it; but, cost Him what it may, will hunt it down, and chase it from His universe, and grind it into annihilation.

That we know; that is our hope—that the power behind things is stubbornly set on righteousness; that the essential make-up of the world is opposed to evil, that this is no haphazard place, a mere chaos and welter of moral confusion, where anything may happen, or may not; but that to sin is to fling ourselves against the powers that be; that evil is insanity, leading one straight, sooner or later, to inevitable punishment. That is the settled basis upon which we build our thinking. A great nation wrongs the world, and we appeal to God with confidence, and live through dark days unafraid, because He is on the throne. Much is amiss in the earth; and, when nothing happens and

reform is slow to come, boldly we lay hands upon immortality, claim all eternity, arguing that if things do not right themselves here, then there must be something more, where evil does go down, and where good does come to its own—must be, we say. God must be holy or the ground gives beneath our feet, and human life is a mere gibbering madhouse, nothing more.

And yet, although so sure of that in theory, none the less we are apt instinctively to deny it, when it tells against ourselves: to assume then that God is inconsistent and self-contradictory; makes exceptions, and will surely do so in our favour; that His laws are not laws, strictly speaking, with tremendous sanctions at their back, rather mere good advice, which we can take or leave; that at times He lets go His holiness, stoops to unblushing favouritism, if it can be given such a name. At a funeral we are all apt to take it for granted, in the face of very tremendous and outspoken Scriptures, that, whatever the dead man may have been, all is now made somehow well for him. And, in truth, seeing that we have all failed and come short of God's glory, what can we frail blunderers do, but leave our erring fellow and ourselves to God's illimitable mercy, and that hopefully. Yet we carry it far. I once stood looking down at a dead blackguard, who had left a sinister trail of misery behind him through the years, whose character had been a kind of upas tree, the deadly drip of which had poisoned and killed every fair thing upon which its shadow fell. "Ah, well!" said his wife softly, "he is at rest now." One wondered if he were: if all the vivid warnings of the grim consequences of deliberate sin are only nursery tales, with no substance behind them. And then there came a memory of that day when Christ was preaching, and was interrupted by

the rending of rafters overhead, the falling dust, and then the sudden sky broke through, and eager heated faces peering down, as they lowered a poor object, too far gone to have a touch of faith himself, before the Master's feet; and how He looked up gratefully, smiled at these hot, resourceful, desperate friends, "Your faith has saved him," He said happily; and it did. So, perhaps (God's love is very wonderful, and He seizes upon any loophole), perhaps, that woman's faith and sturdy affection which years of ill-usage had not killed, might somehow pull him through.

Yet, where it touches ourselves and our dear ones, we just do not believe that God is holy; feel that His moral laws will swerve, will bend aside on our behalf; that He is much too good-natured to mean what He says, or really to stand to it. We are well aware that there are many things in our character that ought to be put right, yet we are not alarmed, and leave them there; feeling that God will find some way to evade His own solemn words, and let us off. It is the vainest of vain dreams. He cannot: and, in our better moments, do we wish it? That is a fearsome prayer of Luther, "O Lord God, punish us, we pray Thee, punish us, but be not silent toward us!" Yet sometimes we can pray it. In any case, whether we like it, or do not, there is a dreadful truth in the great fact of Karma that lies, like a shadow, over so much of the East. "Sow an act, and you reap a habit; sow a habit, and you reap a character; sow a character, and you reap a destiny," as Thackeray put it in words long ago grown trite, and they seed themselves so inevitably. It is not that God changes; always His hands keep seeking; always His voice is calling, calling, calling our name, like a mother her lost child's, desperate until He finds us.

Only, there is the fearsome mystery of the human will; that we, puny though we are, can set ourselves against the Almighty, can resist Him, can look Him impudently in the face and openly defy Him: and that, so far at least as our dim peering eyes can follow, sometimes it is the rebel soul that has its way! There came a time when even the tenderest of the prophets, rejected, broken-hearted, beaten, cried out in despair, "Ephraim is joined to his idols, let him alone": there was a day when Jesus Christ, with His eyes full of tears, could only cry, "O Jerusalem, how often would I have gathered thee; and ye would not: behold your house is left unto you desolate." John Donne, whom some, Quiller Couch for one, rank as, perhaps, the noblest of all English preachers, has a tremendous passage, which some critics put among those in the very forefront of the finest English prose, appalling in its terrible, slow accumulating coldness of horror, till the heart is not far from screaming. "It is a fearefull thing to fall into the hands of the living God: but to fall out of the hands of the living God, is a horror beyond our expression, beyond our imagination"; and then, after musing upon His inexplicable patience toward us, how time after time, thwarted and denied, time after time He begins again as hopefully as ever some yet other way, he ends "that this God at last, should let this soule goe away as a smoake, as a vapour, as a bubble; and that this soule cannot be a smoake, a vapour, nor a bubble, but must lie in darknesse, as long as the lord of light itselfe, and never sparke of that light reach to my soule—to be excluded eternally, eternally, eternally from the sight of God!" That is great English: yet the words are not well chosen. No one is excluded from God's presence; but one can shut oneself out. God

cannot be false to His own nature; "if we deny Him He will deny us": we cannot have both sin and Him; one or other it must be. Always sin is a madman's choice. Let us beware lest, like miserable Judas, throwing down his accursed pieces, hating himself for his incredible folly, we too stand, one day, looking down bewildered at the poor little nothings, faded now and rotted, that lie in our hand, trying to take it in, to beat it into our stunned brain, "For this, for this, for this, I have lost God!"

But to end there were no gospel, as Christ's message is, but one of those half-truths which can be, of all things, the most cruelly untrue. Ben Jonson was of opinion that even Shakespeare would have been a greater than he is, if he had not "forgot that last and greatest art, the art to blot." And few things in the New Testament are so interesting and illuminating as its corrections and its emendations. "That you may know the love of Christ," writes Paul; and then he pauses, turns back, and puts his pen through that; writes above it, "that is silly, you can never know it, for it passes knowledge." Or, to the Galatians, "Now that ye know God," and then he strokes that out, and substitutes "or, rather, are known of Him." So here, did the writer pause, look back, and read what he had quoted, not yet dry, "if we deny Him, He will deny us," and did he feel that is true, and yet it may mislead, and so add the glorious parallel fact even more basal, yet even "if we are faithless, He remains faithful—for He cannot be untrue to Himself?" That is the plain teaching of Christ. Moses, in his day, had a high moment when God was so real and near to him, that he seemed to see and hear Him proclaiming Himself as "the Lord God,

merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and forgiving transgression and sin." His people never forgot that. Often though they failed, they came back to God each time at last, and took His promise in their hands, and boldly held it up before Him, pleading, Thou saidst nothing about us, but Thou didst tell us that Thou wouldest be gracious and forgiving always: Thou didst put no limit to it; Thou madest no conditions; wherefore be pitiful to us, who need Thee so, and pardon us out of pure grace. And you too have had high moments when God was very close, your first communion, the day your mother died, that other, the first in a home of your own, or when a little one was born to you, and your heart was touched and tender, and you swore you would be faithful, were to live life in a big way, made a covenant with Him, and He with you. Oh, it is long ago now, and you had quite forgotten, have grown tashed and frayed and dusty, and quite ordinary after all! But God remembers; still stands by His covenant; His promises still hold, and are still open to you; He abideth faithful, even if we fail. That is the dominant note of Scripture—the amazing, pertinacious, dogged loyalty of God. You hear it everywhere. "Turn ye, turn ye, for why will ye die, O house of Israel!" "All day long I have stretched out imploring hands to you." God, says Paul, haunts us like a beggar not to be repulsed; keeps following us, and breaking in on us again, whenever He sees any chance of gaining our attention; pleading with us to be reconciled to Him, who has nothing but love in His heart for us. The son, says Christ, in the far country forgot all about the Father; but the Father all the time remembered him, saw him a great way off, because His eyes were always searching the road by which he must come, and always

He was slipping out to look for him. "That's he," he cried; when he at last descried a far-off, shabby, hesitating, limping figure, "that is surely he," and ran to him. It is a wonderful reading of God's heart, and oh, the splendour of the fact that it is true! We sin, and God's answer is love; we heap up more sin, and He gives more love; we make our sin an inexcusable thing, and His answer is Calvary. Though we are faithless, He abideth faithful to His own essential nature, cannot be untrue to Himself.

When Cromwell the Protector died, it was a wild September day with the winds howling, and his soul had to wade through a deep patch of darkness. He asked his minister, "Tell me, is it possible to fall from grace?" "No, it is not possible." "Then I am safe, for I know that I was once in grace." And again, "I think I am the poorest wretch that lives: but I love God; or rather am beloved of God." Again that same correction! Again that clinging to the thought that, though we fail, God will stand to His covenant! It is our only hope. I think that minister was too audacious. I have fallen from grace a thousand times; grown cold, and hard, and torpid, sick of the whole business. But it is strangely difficult to escape from God. He follows us, haunts us, hems us in, will not be repulsed nor take refusal! Once in the flock of the Good Shepherd, we have at our back an immensity of sleepless skill and patience that, however often we may spill through each inviting gap in every hedge, finds us again. It is slow work, herding sheep, slow tiring work! They are so apt to stray, to follow one another, are so stupid at the best, so easily tired, or flustered into yet another stampede by just nothing at all. Yet it is a poor shepherd who loses even one. And the most comfortable

passage in the Bible is that in which Christ tells us that His own good name and honour and obedience to God are bound up in His getting us safe home. "I came down, not to do Mine own will, but the will of Him that sent Me: and this is the will of Him that sent Me, that of them that He hath given Me, I should lose—not one." If you are not there at the last, Christ's glory will be dimmed. "But," God will say to Him, "did I not tell you I must have that soul of Mine? Where is it?"

That is what the Calvinists meant by their doctrines. They were not proud, but very humble; they could find no standing ground within themselves, and flung themselves on God; built, not upon their faith, but on God's faithfulness; not on their love to Him so fickle and uncertain, but on His love to them, steady and sure; not on their puny ineffectual efforts, but upon His eternal thoughts and plans. And so must you and I. "One of the most convenient hieroglyphicks of God," says Donne in a more Christian place, "is a circle; and a circle is endlesse; whom God loves, He loves to the end; and not only to their own end, to their death, but to His end; and His end is that He might love them still."

"Often and often," says Samuel Rutherford, "I have in my folly torn up my copy of God's covenant with me; but, blessed be His name, He keeps the principal in heaven safe; and He stands by it always."

X.

THAT QUEER COMPLEX, HUMAN NATURE.

"The son of Adam, the son of God."—Luke iii. 38.

THERE you have it, thrown down bluntly and vividly for all to see, the littleness and the greatness of man; that baffling self-contradiction, carried to such unbelievable lengths, which set Pascal pondering with a pucker on his forehead, all his days; that stares at and confuses all of us. A son of Adam, a mere transient nothing, earthy and of the earth; and yet a son of God, with a real, unquenchable spark of the divine in him! How both? Yet, is it not so we are formed; and from the jar and noisy clashing of these two opposites in us that there arise all our unrest, and all our glory?

"What a piece of work is Man," says Shakespeare, looking up for a moment from his absorbed contemplation of the endless human drama that so fascinated him, "how noble in reason, how infinite in faculty, in form and moving how express and admirable, in action how like an angel, in apprehension how like a God, the beauty of the world"; and then, without a pause, he adds, "and yet to me what is this quintessence of dust?" and launches out into hot scorn! And these two readings of us always jostle one another in his mind.

Sometimes he loves us, for our sheer bigness : at others flames out into a searing contempt, that bites like fire, of such puling, ugly sordidnesses. He will draw you by the score characters so noble that we look up at them reverently, proud to belong to such a breed : yet, turn the page, and he will show you man vicious, drunken, sensual, horrible, crawling his slimy way among the mud—surely the pitifullest of insects after all. Quick ! Set your foot on it, and squelch the noxious thing ! And is it not indeed a strange enigma, this mystery that haunted him, that out of the same stuff of human nature there have been fashioned a Nero, and a Jesus Christ ? And that in every one of us, in you, in me, there is something akin to both of them—a something clean and stately and spiritual, whose home is the stars ; aye and, God pity us, another something, no less surely there, low and grovelling, that pulls us fiercely down with a dreadful haul of steady strength ; that all our days that lesser and that greater in us tug us staggeringly to and fro, spilling and overturning things into a wild disorder ; trampling our characters into a confusion of broken bits of things—sins of which we tire ; and virtues, half won, and then dropped again. For we are earthy and of the earth, yet something more : are august creatures with immortal spirits, and yet something less : sons of Adam, yes ! but also sons of God : children of the most High with His mark plain upon us ; and yet only poor, frail, passionate sons of Adam after all :

> " Sadly mixed natures, self-indulgent, yet
> Self-sacrificing too ; how the love soars,
> How the craft, avarice, vanity, and spite
> Sink again,"

so Browning pictures us, " sliding into silly virtue, and slipping into stupid crime," big and little, good and

bad, lovable and selfish, a babble of a hundred contradictories shouting each other down.

But nowhere has this contrast been photographed so vividly as in the Scriptures, and especially in the teaching of Christ. There are passages, terrible in their frank candour, that look us in the eyes—us, with our incredible achievements, us with our long proud dreams, us with our complacent assurance of our own dignity and importance; and, you, they ask, what are you?—a flower that blooms and fades within the hour, and is immediately forgotten in the crowd of God's creations; a little puff of wind that passes and is gone; a cloud that stains the blue of the heavens, and even as you watch it has died into nothingness; a tiny swirl of common dust, soon laid again, and you are over; till, humbled and abashed, we are herded back among our fellow-animals, from which we had presumed to stray. Yes, but these same Scriptures dream dreams for us, infinitely vaster and more daring than our own, set far off splendid goals before us that dazzle the heart, harbour ambitions upon our behalf that take the breath away; are never content with anything we are, keep crying to us with urgency not to waste ourselves like that; for we can do far bigger and far better things than these; both can and must, both must and will; for that, pointing to our hard-won achievements, surely cannot satisfy you, who are obviously planned for something vastly more! The littleness, and the greatness of man!

It is the littleness that haunts the thinking of to-day, partly as the outcome of a natural reaction. Meredith in one of his poems has a vivid metaphor in which he tells us that the progress of the world, mental and otherwise, is like that of a drunk man, in

that it lurches all but into the ditch of the extreme upon one side, and saves itself only by staggering with a sudden tipsy run all but into the hedge of the opposite extreme upon the other; and so to and fro unsteadily, never advances fairly down the centre of the road. And that is true; the faith of to-day is the doubt of to-morrow. Round and round goes the wheel, and you can almost count upon its revolutions. So it is here. A generation back men basked in a kind of self-glorifying that was almost worship, felt that they could do anything, their proud heads knocked against the stars, and indeed they lived in a great age, with genius springing everywhere like a wayside weed. "Father!" cried Heine boastfully, in his day, "Tut, we are of age, and do not need a Father's care"; so fools thought then, as fools think still. But since then we have tossed through a long hot night of pain and fever and dreadful dreams, that proved to be no nightmare, but a grim reality; and, like a child in the sudden darkness of a tunnel, our riotous independence vanished, we have been feeling for our Father's despised hand, glad to grip it, and make sure that He is here. For life has proved more difficult than we had estimated, has deeper mysteries in it than we had realized; moreover, we have grown somewhat tired of our discoveries, stunned by their revelation of how huge and wonderful is this world of ours, how meagre our own knowledge; shiver a little, with the unknown all about us—we so frail, so helpless, so entirely unimportant, so soon out of it all! An immense sense of human insignificance weighs on our spirits, crushing and unnerving us; or else it tends to make us cynical, merely jaded by enthusiasm, only amused at thought of the high chivalries to which we are summoned; or it tempts us to fling through things

anyhow (what does it matter ?), to grasp greedily at pleasure—that at least is real—before this tiny bubble of our life winks itself into nothingness, and is gone. We are, like Emerson, emerging that night from the heated meeting of men so passionate about what seemed to them so all-important, taken aback and daunted by the placidity of Nature, to whom it all meant just nothing at all. "Why so hot, little man, why so hot ?" After all, what is human history, they ask, with all its pomps and sacrifices but the heaving of a restless ant-heap ? This earth, that seems so vast to us, is literally a mere dust speck, lost in the infinities of space ; so tiny, that the nearest star has never noticed it is here ; so trivial, that, did our whole solar system drop out of the sky to-night, it would make no more difference in the illimitable heavens of God than when in a forest, miles long and more miles wide, one leaf flutters to earth somewhere at its heart. This hum of our human affairs, that so fills our ears and seems to us so big a noise, has never disturbed the silence of the universe, and in a little while it will be altogether stilled again ; and earth, with its brief history over, be once more dark, unpeopled, silent, dead. As Bertrand Russell, and many another, put it, "No philosophy can hope to stand that does not build with such gloomy material as that no fire, no heroism, no intensity of thought and feeling can preserve an individual beyond the grave ; that all the labours of the ages, all the devotion, all the inspiration, all the noonday brightness of human genius are destined to extinction in the vast death of the solar system" ; and that, apparently, nothing that is anywhere will be either any better or any worse for all that was dreamed, attempted, gallantly achieved in this forgotten little planet of the infinitely long ago. Why bother

and why worry then ? It is all a running after nothing, and an achieving it at last. " You taught me language," says Caliban, " and my profit on't is I know how to curse " : and the brave tale of human progress too ends in a like ridiculous fiasco, it would seem ! As Francis Thompson has it, in lines of sombre grandeur, " What is this man who sweats and brags and rots ? " whose heart " builded for pride, for potency, infinity, all heights, all depths, and all immensities, gives lodging to ' the carrion worm,' whose hands can ' sift the stars,' weighing them ' like gold dust,' and yet win no inheritance but ' four planks ' and ' a little mould ' ; whose mouth, ' avid ' for all the glorious things, is filled at last with a poor ' puff of dust.' " So, " peeling " us of our Godhead, and stripping our fictitious glory from us, his bitter mood hoots us down to the dulness that is our true portion. Better face the humiliating facts, and cease to be fooled by our egregious dreams ! From the earth we come, and to the earth we go again, poor sons of Adam, nothing more ; till crushed and broken, it does not seem to us to matter what we make of this pitiful life of ours.

But are they facts, or at least all the facts ? Is this a fair or accurate or possible reading of the humanity about us, and of our own restless and eager spirits ? In this wonderful universe of God it is not the way of truth to cow and depress. Turgenieff tells us of his Lear of the Steppes that " he carried a very strong odour about with him ; there was a smell of the earth, of decaying forest, of marsh mud about him." He lets that drop in the bygoing, now and then, not concealing it, but passing on to tell of other things as truly there, of the hopes and the pathos and the crude struggling soul, and the queer unexpected lovableness that lay

concealed in that huge, shambling, uncouth body. But your modern novelist has nothing it appears to tell us of humanity at all, except that it is earthy and smells badly unwashed ; gives us small vision of the gallantries and the unselfishnesses and the bigness we see for ourselves are there ; accounts himself an entomologist, studying a peculiarly unpleasant insect. But, as Tennyson says, does not the heart "rise up in wrath" at such a travesty ; grow quite hot and indignant over what it feels is a foul lie ? What a relief to turn to Jesus' teaching, with its perfect balance ; where we feel we are among real men again, that this He is describing is drawn from, and to the life. Often, indeed, He makes us flush with His unexpected revelation of what we thought nobody knew. "I don't count it friendly of you to have told Rufus about me," Epictetus says they would complain to one another as they left the lecture-room. "You!" cried the other, "why, man, it was me he was describing." There is a like uncomfortable accuracy in our Lord's faithful insight into our littlenesses. Yet He always treats us as great creatures, talks to us almost as to equals, makes confident claims upon us, the immensity of which is our chief honour and our letters patent of nobility. For His claims are only promises inverted : if He asks that, it is because He feels that we can give that. It was not to insects that Christ said so calmly, as if stating a commonplace, "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect." And our hearts respond to that ; know that other portrait is a caricature, a cheap effect produced by exaggerating our flaws. We feel that there are gallantries and possibilities within us, as Christ says ; that, though the earth will perish, we shall not ; and that our dreams and hopes are

not mere will-o'-the-wisps, but rather sign-posts set by Someone all along a solid road that leads to a real place, where our dreams will come true. We stretch out these little hands of ours, and lay hold upon tremendous things, immortality among them, as our right. "I have taken all knowledge for my province," said Bacon: and we gaze astonished at so lordly a mind. But we have taken all eternity as ours. We need it, we calmly explain, as if that were reason enough; our plans cannot be worked out sooner; look up into the face of the Eternal, and say, "Thou, O Lord, in the beginning didst lay the foundations of the earth, the heavens also are the work of Thy hands: they shall perish, but Thou abidest; and they shall wax old as doth a garment, and like a vesture shalt Thou change them, and they shall be changed. But Thou remainest, and Thy years shall not fail"—and no more will ours! For we are Thy children, and have something of Thy nature in us, and will last as long as Thou! Is it just madness, the mere raving of an insane pride? No, say the Scriptures, that is the divine in you, and you can trust it. These facts too are there, and must be given their due place in your conception of yourself and of your fellows. "We can see at once," says Bradley the philosopher, "that there is nothing more real than what comes in religion. To compare facts such as these with what comes to us in outward existence would be to trifle with the subject. The man who demands a reality more solid than that of the religious consciousness knows not what he seeks."

Transient though we are, pathetic in our frailty, none the less we are great creatures, august, tremendous, everlasting. See to it that you build your lives upon that plan, and shape your characters upon that scale!

For, sons of Adam though we be, we are still sons of God.

"Sons of Adam," you mark that! For the phrase is the accepted symbol of that disaster that overtook us and that has thrown us ever since into constant jeopardy—"that horrid burden and impediment on the soul which the churches call sin, and which, by whatever name we call it, is a very real catastrophe in the moral nature of man," as Morley said. It is the fashion to smile such talk loftily aside. Evolution has put all that right for us! There was no fall, of course. Rather are we creatures, only half made as yet, climbing blindly and painfully out of ourselves and towards the light. No doubt. But how does Evolution alter the essential facts? The old frothy rhetoric about an Aristotle being the rubbish of an Adam is indeed gone; and no loss either. These earliest ancestors of ours were not presentable, crude animals or very little more. Yet here are you and I; and we know good and we know evil; know we should choose the one, and should reject the other. To that, somehow, on our upward march we have attained; must have, for we possess it now; rose somewhere above mere instinct and reached moral responsibility. And the first time that good was seen and refused, that evil was known and chosen, there we fell; then we involved ourselves in what so spoils our life! So easily began those habits, that are now cut so deep. Ruskin has a graphic passage, in which he describes how at first the earth lay flat and featureless, and how its contours were all settled by the first night's dew and the first shower of rain! That little runnel, where a drop ran, then and there was destined to be cut into a wide valley, in which huge cities would nestle; that little speck of dust avoided to become the summit

of a range of mighty mountains, high in air; because more and more inevitably, each new drop would tend to run in the groove marked out by its predecessors. And I, sings Mrs. Meynell:

> "I am like a stream that flows
> Full of the cold springs that arose
> In morning lands, in distant hills:
> And down the plain my channel fills
> With melting of forgotten snows."

That is no fable, but the grimmest of realities. The sins of men and women, dead centuries ago, are your temptations now; their passions seethe along your blood; the character they built and handed on to you is now your problem, poor sons of Adam that we are, with our fearsome inheritance! No one can tell, as Clifford put it, how many times gold has been melted and has cooled, but "a living being must always contain within itself the history, not merely of its own existence, but of all its ancestors." It will not be easy to break free, for the thing is engrained! It must mean pain and toil and many a discouragement. For while, as Dante saw, in heaven the law of things is naturally to ascend, our very spirits here are subject to the law of gravity, and tend to fall.

Yet let us not lose heart. If that is our inheritance, happily it is not our only one. That we are earthborn is certain, yet no less sure is it, on the same evidence, that we are not entirely earthborn, that there are other instincts in us, just as real as are these first, immeasurably hardy, and not to be choked out or killed. There is a "Presence that disturbs us with the joy of elevated thoughts," "whose dwelling is the mind of man," our mind; "there is a piece of divinity within us," as Sir Thomas Browne has it, "that was before the elements,

and owes no homage unto the sun" ; there is a hunger, a passion, a yearning for righteousness and the big gallant things and ways, that cries in the night, and will not be hushed over for long, but reawakes, and frets again for what it has not got, with thin, persistent, tireless wailings. Somehow, says William James, to be true and clean "tastes better." Why ? Whence comes all this, if so be it is not a dim reflection in us of God's holiness, proof that we are His children, with something of His nature really alive in us ? These things are there, as Browning says. I cannot account for them, nor explain them. But no more can I stifle them, "being bound to trust all feelings equally, to hear all sides." And listening to what he finds in himself, he knows that he is bigger than this earth, built on a plan it cannot satisfy. Stretch out your hands and take what is your own—God's ways, God's mode of life, God's character. "Be a king," his mother used to urge George III., and he grew up a sorry creature ! But Christ says to us, "Be a god !" For is not God's perfection, to which He incites us, God's real Godliness, what makes Him God ? And, in that loftiest sense, we are to become partakers of the divine nature, you and I ! For if, as Epictetus saw, God is our Father and we are His children, then it must follow that "having realized this kinship, no mean or unworthy thought of ourselves can enter our souls, the sense of it must form a rule and standard for our lives. If God be faithful, we also must be faithful ; if God be kind, we also must be kind, doing and saying whatever we do and say in union with, and imitation of Him." "If," says the Testament, there is no "if" ! "Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us that we should be called the children of God, and such we are." Aye !

and we must walk worthy of our birth, our lineage, our wonderful Father. "The Lord direct your hearts," prays Paul, laying his hand on the two things in the divine that most impressed him, "into the love of God, and the patience of Christ." So, back to your life and face its difficulties with no whimpering; but learning to show something of the indomitable courage of Christ's heart, and of the huge unselfishness of God. For, passionate, frail, foolish sons of Adam we may be, yet we are still God's children; and we must grow up into our Father's likeness, and put on our Father's ways.

And, to encourage us, let us remember that these are the last two lines in a kind of genealogy of Jesus Christ. He too, says Scripture, everywhere, had our nature as His portion; a fact we are apt to forget, and so to rob ourselves of much of the inspiration and thrill that His victory should bring; to push it away almost pettedly as a sham fight, a foregone conclusion, whereas ours is fierce, and real, and grim, and desperately uncertain in its issue. But Christ is our true brother. Son of God, He was a real son of Adam, that we, children of Adam, might become true sons of God. We look at a newborn child, and wonder that it should ever grow up into a man; but Edward Irving was struck quite the other way. Strange, he thought, that all this mass of possibility should as a rule end in so very little. So, look at Jesus Christ, at what He made of life, and is it not a staggering thing that, with that possible, we have made only this of it? No doubt, as a baby (before His will took control) He was just as other babies, and when sleep would not come, wailed out the monstrous wrong to the whole universe, as is their imperious way. And Mary would explain that her wee man was tired

and fretty. And, later, He was tempted in all points like as we are, though, as the Scriptures add proudly, He did no sin. Few things, indeed, are so self-revealing and so personal as one's temptations, yet most of those things that storm our hearts so easily, knocked truculently at the door of His, though they gained no admission. It was our fight He had to fight ; our nature was His battlefield; our weapons were His only weapons; He too walked by faith, and threw Himself on God, and followed where it sometimes looked to Him all dark and strange. And He made that of life, out of what we have twisted into this soiled misshapen character of ours ! Do you not see the glory, the hopefulness, the responsibility of that, how it has lifted us all higher, made the old standards obsolete ? There it stands, that wonderful life, not a dream, but a fact, a thing actually done that challenges us, and makes everything else look shabby and faded and befingered. It is a great thing, says Mr. Chesterton, to have an ideal to ennoble our facts ; but it is even more to have a fact to prove our ideals. And that is not the least of what our Lord has done for us—to prove that it is not, as our tired hearts sometimes tell us peevishly it is, only a beautiful and hopeless and impossible dream, "the desire of the moth for the star," a stretching out of futile hands that must always come immeasurably short. It has been lived, that yearning of our soul, aye, and far more and better than our bold and hungry hearts had ever dared to picture or desire. Yes, and this is the tremendous promise of the Testament, that what He is, that you and I can grow to be.

What do you say about it all ? On which side of your nature are you resolved to throw your weight ? Poor earthlings that we are, shall we live for this tiny earth

of ours? Like a yokel at a fair made heady by the blare of the whirligigs, and the heat, and the crowding, and the flares, shall we stand and gape at the world's poor booths, and give our all for its vulgar and dusty nothings? Or, remembering that we are sons of God, shall we try to live in His way, undaunted by innumerable failures, unbroken by our sore falls and our too regular defeats, doggedly confident that if only we hope enough, try enough, pray enough, believe enough, the end of it, please God, will be that—

"Man and his littleness perish, erased like an error and cancelled: Man and his greatness survive, lost in the greatness of God."

XI.

CHRIST AND THE AILING WORLD.

"He healed those who had need of healing."—Luke ix. 11.

THAT is a fine phrase, comfortable from its very roomy vagueness. Cannot you see them, these thin trickles of ailing folk from every hamlet, swelling into a steady stream, all making their slow, painful way to Jesus Christ, with every face turned in His direction, and on each a new eagerness breaking through the dull, numb, settled apathy; and He so touched, so kindly, so compassionate, so strangely helpful, that you could trace His progress through the country by the sunshine He has left behind? Here Christ has been. For look! here are no breaking hearts, no weary, careworn faces! So it was in the old days. He healed those who had need of healing, counting that need a sufficient plea, and an unanswerable claim upon Him.

And to-day are we not gathered here because we have heard that He may come, lining the road for Him? Some of us, indeed, with no great expectation, drawn hither by a rather idle interest; but some among us desperate to light on Him. And what if it be true; no old-world fairy story blown about the centuries! What if Christ really has a rest for weary folk, a peace for fevered, tossing, fretted hearts, a cure for sinful souls! Were it not well to try? Suppose that Christ

were present so that you could see Him, and could hear Him saying, with His eyes eagerly fastened on your face, "What wilt thou I should do for you?" What would you choose? What is your need? What do you feel to be wrong in your life, until His touch, falling upon you, makes you sane, and well, and whole?

Well, to begin with, Fiona Macleod tells us that in the Celtic Paradise, when the souls of the redeemed win there, they are thrilled with a gladness almost too glad, that is nearly pain, as eyes can be blinded by excess of light, until they are led to a lonely little lochan of grey, wan, shivery water, fed constantly by all the tears shed on the earth; and there they stoop and bathe their eyes, and are healed of their too great gladness. And were it not well if you and I could find our way to that sad little pool, could bathe our eyes in it, and have them opened to the ache and agony of the world around us, and so be saved from our too selfish happiness? For, as things are, life for many of us is so good a thing—rich, splendid, interesting, beautiful—that we become absorbed in our own abundant little gladnesses, and forget that for many quite near to us it is bleak and wind-swept. We have no share in the Saviour's suffering for the world, use our life meanly and shabbily, and without realizing it is given us to burn out in serviceableness, to spend in God's own way—God, who keeps nothing for Himself, but presses everything He has on whoso will accept it. Believe me, says Christ, that a day is coming when you will look back at your finished life, its long, ardent ambitions, its hot, strenuous endeavours, its noise and dust and rush and pother, and see that it is emptiness and shadow, except where here and there you turned aside to be thoughtful and

unselfish. All the rest will then have withered, that alone blooms on—

> "That best portion of a good man's life,
> His little, nameless, unremembered acts of kindness and of love."

It is so difficult to credit that! No one, says Paul, stating a tremendous truth, liveth to himself. Yet many make a resolute attempt, that looks at least as if it were successful; seem almost wholly self-absorbed, with few if any vital interests beyond their own bits of affairs. One has known stagnant, little, country towns so utterly engrossed in their own petty politics and bickerings and dull local news that, did the whole round earth break off beyond a radius of half a dozen miles from them, they would scarcely notice it, for their horizon would remain precisely as before; and there are many lives that seem as local and parochial and purely personal. Hazlitt declares that if there had been no other being in the universe except himself, Wordsworth's poetry would have been just what it is. "He sits at the centre of his own being; he does not waste a thought on others; he thrusts aside all other subjects, all other interests, with impatience, to unfold the precious stores of a mind for ever brooding on itself." And many live a somewhat similar island life, sit in the centre of their own affairs, absorbed in them and little else, build up their days in such a way that they are as little affected by what happens outside of their narrow borders as is one on a wild winter night who draws the curtains of his cosy room, and sits lost in some book before the fire, by all the howling and the lashing of the elements without, against which other folk are battling with difficulty, but which he scarcely so much as hears. Our work, our home, our friends, our

children, is not that our world ? And yet surely Christ is right, and humanity makes progress only as it widens its sympathies, and enlarges its interests. Dostoieffsky in one place declares that the only thing that civilization has done for us is to increase our sensibility, our capacity for pain, the pain that comes from sympathy ; and wishes plaintively that he were an insect, and so safe from the pangs that his human nature brings him. And, in truth, many of us are insects, nothing more. Your selfish man can only be hurt in his own person, and is fairly secure. He has so small an area to guard. But as we rise in the scale of being, this vulnerable surface becomes ever larger. We can be wounded now in our wife, our children, our family, our friends. And God's plan seems to be that this circle of those who matter to us, and through whom we can be injured, should widen out and out, till it is co-extensive with humanity. " Agonies are one of my changes of garments," says Whitman ; " I do not ask the wounded person how he feels. I myself become the wounded person. And whoever walks a furlong without sympathy, walks to his own funeral drest in his shroud." At the bottom of the scale there are only crude things, mere living greedinesses, animate absorptions, with not an interest outside themselves ; at the other end there is that fulness of life that we call God, in whom there is no place for self at all, whose whole existence is a splendour of self-sacrifice. And people, thank God, know that now, and when in trouble turn to Him instinctively. The rest of us, they are aware, are too rushed to be bothered, do not mind much, are immersed in our own affairs, throw at best a word of sympathy, and so to our own lives again. But God, they know, does care, does feel, is not too busy, with all His universes, to

enter into this worry of theirs, and whole-heartedly help them. I did not know Him at first, Tagore confesses, when I came upon Him, for He was dusty and tired; had been all day in the sun with the stone-breakers and the tillers of the hot fields—while you and I, so long as trouble does not thunder at our door, go unconcerned and whistling cheerily through this grey, ailing world, so full of breaking hearts. Blake argues with assurance from his own sympathetic nature to the heart of God and His far ampler and more poignant charity:

> "Think not thou canst sigh a sigh,
> And thy Maker is not nigh.
> Think not thou canst weep a tear,
> And thy Maker is not near.
> O! He gives to us His joy
> That our grief He may destroy,
> Till our grief is past and gone
> He doth sit by us and moan."

There is a very noble picture in the National Gallery. Christ is upon the cross, which is shrouded deep in the gross darkness; and at first that is all one sees. Yet, as one looks longer, out of the blackness there looms up a Figure, with His arms tenderly upholding Christ, and His face stricken with an agony more awful even than the Saviour's own. So is it that God always lives, afflicted in all our afflictions; and the mystery, the awe, the terror of Calvary is that where Christ hung God hung, that His heart too was broken there. At the one end, crude selfishnesses; at the other, God: and we fix our rank by our nearness to the one or to the Other. And how low down some of us stand! For, as there are vestiges of outgrown creatures in our bodies, so our brain has carried on the instincts of these crawling

greedinesses still. Only partially have we struggled out of bestiality into humanity. "Man is not Man as yet."

But, blessed be His name, God in His mercy helps us. "I pray," says Unamuno, closing his book, "that He may deny you peace, and give you glory." Is that the meaning of the dark things that have come to you? Has the Potter, who with a quick thumb and finger deftly fashions ordinary clay into quite serviceable vessels, seen that there are nobler possibilities in you, and is He holding you on the whirring wheel and in the hissing flames; calling you to some high ministry of helpfulness and healing, as even Christ, says Scripture, could not have been so apt a Saviour, with so delicate a touch, and so instinctive an understanding, had not He too been made perfect through suffering. When we rail against the ills of life, and God's gross and unaccountable mismanagement of things, telling Him with heat, in many a querulous prayer, that if only He would stand aside, how much quicker and more adroitly we would manage; asking Him, with surprise at his dulness, if He cannot see for Himself how much wiser and kinder, and in all ways better, our plan we ask Him to substitute is to His own impossible one, let us try to remember that it is the sore things in life that have created in us all that gives glory to humanity, and that our own hearts most value; that without pain there could have been no courage, no tenderness, no unselfishness, no sympathy; that men and women would have been, not the great creatures that we know, but soft, fat, flabby, uninteresting things, crawling about a flat and muddy earth with never a height in it, dragging themselves through a torpid life with not a touch of splendour in the greyness of their skies; and if the

bite of that sharp chisel is now at work on us, let us, pressing our lips firmly to keep back the whimpering, suffer in an awe that is half gratitude, since on us, too, God is at work, the God whose eyes have often seen in such unpromising material things so august and splendid, aye, and whose hands have worked them out —this wonderful world out of a wisp of vapour, and Christlike souls from raw folk, like you and me. "I look upon you," Coleridge wrote to Lamb in his hour of appalling grief, "as a man called by sorrow and anguish and a strange desolation of hopes into quietness, and a soul set apart, and made peculiar to God."

And surely Christ will aid us, the marvellous Christ, who went about doing good, that exquisite biography, who could not remain outside of anybody's trouble, who spent all that He had so liberally for those with never a claim on Him, who gave His whole life a ransom for many, for all hurt, ailing, broken things. Now that He stands and asks, "What wilt thou I should do for you," have you the wit to answer, "Lord, that my eyes may be opened," that I may see the pain and sorrow in the world, may have to feel it, and to make it mine, may be healed of my too selfish happiness.

And then there are those who are tired, are always tired, always anxious, always more than half-afraid— people for whom most of the glories of life are nothing but a thin rumour faintly heard, for what do they know of music, art, literature, the glorious things that others revel in, they who are chained down to a monotony of drab little duties, whose whole day is spent in getting through, to lie down at last dog-tired, and rise unrested, and begin it all over again, and this day after day. That is their life and sometimes they feel that it is

not life, but only keeping life alive. "What is this life," asks Mr. Davies :

> "If, full of care,
> We have no time to stand and stare,
> No time to stand beneath the boughs
> And stare as long as sheep and cows.
> A poor life this if, full of care,
> We have no time to stand and stare."

By which I suppose he means, as Christ says, "Look on everything you see with wonder." And indeed it is a wonderful world. But they have no time to stand, no time to stare, no time to wonder, they so rushed and jostled, so hot and bustled and tired. And then there are the shadows, dark and creepy shadows that hold who knows what ; if indeed life has not become already only an interlude between a memory and a hope. Strength is failing, and yet the business must be carried on, but how ? Or there are symptoms of disease, and one just cannot afford to think of it, puts it resolutely out of mind and struggles on, yet it is there ! And they know mind and heart and body cannot always stand this strain ; and then, what then ? "Does the road wind uphill all the way ? Yes, to the very end." And they make no whimper of complaint, look somewhat fearfully at the long, steep, dusty, uphill track, mile upon mile, year upon year ; sigh a little to themselves, but say nothing at all, cheerily heave up the load to the galled, fretted shoulder, and undauntedly, courageously face the stiff brae of life once more—the gallant creatures that they are ! And it is all so common that our eyes are holden to the sheer heroism of it ! And who is there to help them, except Jesus Christ with His assurance that we are not alone, left to make shift as best we can, but children living in our

Father's house, and with Him always close beside us, always thinking of us, always planning upon our behalf; that worry is stupid, and care needless; for He cannot forget us, we are far too dear to Him for that, will never overlook us, He our Father! Remember how it worked out in our Lord's case. His was a wintry life, that had known not only the howling storms that sweep shatteringly through the heart, and at which we hold our breath, feeling that God is very near, but the little nagging disagreeables that seem too petty to be part of a divine discipline are apt to fret us raw and sore. He had felt the pinch of poverty, the uncomfortableness of lack of money: once at least He had not the wherewithal to pay His taxes, and remembers how that feels; He saw plans break, and hopes shatter, and friends who were very dear to Him fail and stab and betray Him, yet He went on, on to the very end, brave, valiant, big-hearted, because so sure of God, that He was utterly undaunted. And, says He, "He is My Father, and your Father, He is My God, and your God." What I found in Him, you too can have.

And then there is our commonplaceness, that colourless mediocrity which so depresses some of us. For here are we, lost in the crowd of creation, undistinguishable at a very little distance; our voice cannot carry, anything that we can do is so futile and small as not to be worth offering; and so we drift into the sin of the man with the one talent. Ah! it was genius to make him the one who hid his gift. If we had ten or five, how gladly would we serve; but what can we do? And yet, "God," said Lincoln, "likes commonplace people best; that is why He makes so many of us." At least this is sure, that nobody can take your place with Him: and that there is some work He wishes to have

done; and, of all possible creatures His mind could conceive, you are the likeliest to do it for Him, and therefore is it you are here. "I think," wrote Darwin, "I could make something of a case against the enormous importance which you attribute to our greatest men. I have been accustomed to think second, third, and fourth rate men of very high importance, at least in the case of science"; while Mr. Chesterton declares that it is the man in the street who is the great figure in the drama of the world. If a library, he says, has to be catalogued, or a solar system discovered, we use up our experts for that; but when there is something really serious to be done; when, for example, a life is hanging in the balances, and a man must be tried, you summon just twelve ordinary men. And when I think of it, he adds, "did not the Founder of Christianity do the very same?" "You see your calling," says Paul, "not many wise or mighty"; a few slaves, a small tradesman or two, some ill-educated women met in their pokey garret—little wonder laughter followed them. What could they do? Well, they have changed the world: and if we really gave our faith and love and service, we too could do almost anything.

"I am the God of Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob," our Lord once quoted. "Of Abraham"! ah, that we understand, feel that God's heart must indeed run out to the brave dreamers of great dreams, the valiant spirits who stand for the unseen and eternal things, who keep bringing home to "the seething herd, the clucking, foolish mass" of us some sense of the bigness of this life of ours; but from that high office we seem far away indeed, we whose thoughts are a mere echo of the general opinion, with no touch of spiritual daring or originality. "Of Jacob"! that does startle us, that God should

deign to link His name with that mean, slinking figure, with the shifty eyes and the blackguardly heart; and yet do we not feel the fierce grip of His arms about us, see His mouth set firm in a determination that will never break, hear Him say, "If I have to wade through hell for you, well I will do it, but I will not give you up," feel a sense of happy helplessness steal over us, for love like God's will never give, is going to have its blessed way with us. But "of Isaac"! his God too! Is there not something very comforting in that? For does not he stand there among the patriarchs the representative of plain and humdrum folk like you and me, with nothing in him to attract the eye either for good or evil; drifting through life, as do the most of us; not telling very much in any direction; for whose existence, as for ours, there seems no very pressing need. Sometimes we feel our drabness cuts us off from God. For what can it matter to Him what becomes of us, turned out by the myriad according to pattern, so easily replaced! Frederick the Great, said Carlyle, did believe in a God; but he assumed that he and "his bits of affairs" could have no interest for Him. Ah! but God is the God of Isaac no less than of Jacob; and in the circle of the Twelve there were not only mighty souls like John and Peter, but lesser folk like Judas not Iscariot, who asked one question in three years, and Simon called Zelotes, who said never a word. And yet they also were Christ's friends, and on them too He leaned. Can any one be unimportant for whom Christ died? Yet He did that for you. Can any one be insignificant who is so much to God that, if all the rest were safely gathered home, and only one place, your place, were yet vacant, still there would be a shadow round the throne, a pain and aching in His heart for His one child still lost to

Him, out in the cold and dark and rain. There is an emptiness in God's heart only you can fill, not John, not Peter, no not Christ Himself. Your Father's heart wants you. So does Christ heal us of our self-contempt.

But in the main it is from our failure, from our besetting sins, from our engrained habits, that we must be cured. How horrible a thing is this evil within us, like a snake, the Scripture says, in an appalling metaphor, so loathsome that involuntarily we shudder, so hideously strong, so dreadfully expert in any element, so ugly and repulsive, crawling and twisting there, so devilishly venomous! And in me there is a thing like that. Among the ruins of my nature, built as a Temple of the Most High God, there crawl and breed such abominable horrors! And yet how little as a rule we care. Iago is surely the most hateful character in literature, coldly, deliberately, maliciously evil. Yet outwardly he was a jovial youth, a gay and rollicking roysterer, lolling among his boon companions, and roaring out his boisterous songs:

> "And let me the canakin clink, clink!
> And let me the canakin clink!"

That, in a man or in an age, is the last touch of horror. He is what he is, and he is happy! Yet some of us do yearn and strive to be quite different from what we are, and who is there to help us, except Jesus Christ? Sometimes His power acts almost magically, it would seem. A man is lifted up above himself, his former nature sloughs off, like a snake's skin; he is no longer a worm moving slowly and with painfully arched back, but a winged thing darting how easily here and there, wantoning in God's sunshine. Is that what Paul means by his promise that Christ can make us more than conquerors?

I know that his was an exuberant nature, that he was wont to speak in superlatives, that face to face with Jesus Christ words seemed to him a sorry medium, that he begins a sentence and leaves it unfinished, breathlessly rushing off on some new track, that he heaps up metaphors, that he finds even the Greek language a poor instrument and invents stronger terms than any that he can discover. And perhaps this too is due to that. But may there not be more ?—that Paul guarantees that Christ can make us not only conquerors, but can lift us above the need of even fighting the grim enemies who now hold us so securely in thrall, mastering us with such maddening and contemptuous ease ; that then they will no longer even dare to challenge us, will have no further grip on us, will have been shaken off and left behind ; and we be outside the extreme range of their artillery, rid even of temptation to the old inveterate failings, as much a part of our personality to-day, in Christ's terrific phrase, as our hand and our eye. That often happens with an abrupt immediacy, where there is faith enough in Christ. And why should anybody question it ? For these characters of ours, fixed though they seem, are far from stable. If, said Foster, we could gather together in one room our various selves, as we have been at different portions of our life, we would find them a most violently disputatious company, with little in common, and small attraction for each other. Was I ever that absurd fellow so sure and hot about what now seems to be merely grotesque ? one would mutter in amazement of another ; and they would soon fling apart, with no desire ever to meet again. A girl, an ambition, a sport, anything almost will sometimes change the entire lines of a man's life and character, make a new creature of him. And a passion for

Jesus Christ, a sudden understanding of His grace and love, acts similarly, but more radically still.

Yet usually Christ's cures are more slow and tedious. He does not always heal with a touch. Rather year follows year, and we seem only what we were! Ah, but much more is happening than we realize; a new earth is being formed beneath the waters, and it may emerge at any moment. There is a pathetic tale told by Brown of *Rab and his Friends*, about a Dr. Belfrage, a minister in Edinburgh more than a hundred years ago, whose wife died; and there was no portrait of her. And so, although ignorant of art, he procured the materials for miniature painting and eight ivory plates, and shut himself into a room, remained there fourteen days, and emerged at last, worn, haggard, thought to be dying, with seven of the plates smashed into fragments, but on the eighth a speaking likeness of the face that he had lost. We, too, are sorry bunglers, have no art nor skill in reproducing in ourselves the face and ways and character of Christ. We try and try, and nothing comes of it; wasted year after wasted year lies broken. But one day we shall catch the knack of it, shall have His very ways and mind and character, line for line, and touch for touch, a speaking likeness. For are not Christ's own skilled hands laid upon ours, guiding our blundering fingers? Do you remember the close of the *Phædo*, one of the most moving things in literature? Wordsworth linked it with two others as "the most pathetic of human compositions." The last discourse is over, the poison has been taken; Socrates has lain down; the cold is mounting up and up the limbs—"When this reaches the heart," the gaoler says, "that will mean death"—the first agony of his friends' grief is stilled, and they stand round, dazed and broken-

hearted, when suddenly the great soul, lifting the covering from his face, "Crito," he said, "I owe a cock to Æsculæpius, let it be paid," and spake no other word, but passed. But what a passing! I owe an offering to the God of healing, I who at last am really healed.

XII

CHRIST'S JOY IN LIFE.

"O righteous Father, the world hath not known Thee: but I have known Thee."—JOHN xviii. 25.

"These things have I spoken unto you, that My joy may be in you, and your joy full."—JOHN xv. 11.

IT is quite obvious from the Gospels that the gladdest soul that ever lived a human life was Jesus Christ. He had, no doubt, a way of sighing to Himself, one of the very few personal traits that the niggardly evangelists let slip to us; and He was haunted by the mysteries of life, so touched by the sorrows of hurt things that, on occasion, His voice could stumble and break, and His eyes fill with tears; and in the sobbing of the minor psalms He found something akin to His own mind at times. And indeed music with no bass notes in it is apt to be thin, tinkling stuff; and a Master with no shadow in His eyes and no sore in His heart could never have become the Saviour of this desperate world. And yet, quite evidently, Christ carried with Him through the earth an atmosphere of gladness: when He appeared the sun came out, and where He was the brave green banners of the spring were flung out everywhere; as was said of Wilberforce, when He "entered a room, every face lit up." Every one noticed it, and many actively disliked it; the thing indeed became a scandal, and crowds of earnest-minded

people would have nothing to do with Him, refused to take Him seriously, or so much as consider His claims upon this very ground. The Baptist, that austere, grave character, they felt, was really a religious man. But this happy-hearted Teacher, surrounded by that buoyant group of eager hearts and sunny faces, was no prophet, that was clear, for He wore none of the traditional trappings of the part. Was He even a religious man? For themselves, they seriously doubted it. And this, for all conceivable reasons, because they thought Him flippant, so they said! He seldom fasted; He was, they held, a Sabbath-breaker and lax in far too many ways; His life was not sad coloured, He entered unashamed into clean human joys: He believed, as Ruskin says, that "we are converted, not to long and gloomy faces, but to round and laughing ones"; and with St. Francis, that sadness belongs to the devil and his angels, but we, believing what we do believe, and knowing what we know, what can we do, except rejoice?

And so Christ looked at these sour, disapproving faces glooming upon Him, wondering at their idea of religion, and the odd type of God they seemed to serve. For His own was so glorious, that always at the thought of Him His heart exulted and went singing on its way. And He frankly confessed that He was very happy, that He found life a good thing, a splendid adventure; so much so, He said, that He and those around Him felt like a bridal party on the wedding morning. For always they stood upon the threshold of happy hours, always a door was opening upon such glorious things, and every day that dawned let in new crowding opportunities of ever gladder service. "How good is this life, the mere living; how fit to employ all the heart, all the soul, all the senses for ever in joy," cries

Browning's David. And here is Jesus Christ, at the close of what looks to us a grey lot, and with the Cross to face to-morrow, giving back His little tale of years to God with a heart all aglow over a gift so very good. "Father, I thank Thee that I have known Thee," bless Thee that I have had My life with all its opportunities and splendours! Art has fastened for its subject on the Suffering Saviour, concentrating on that so exclusively that even Michael Angelo flames up into shocked protest, hotly demanding why it is always the Crucified we see, though Christ was only six hours on the Cross, and never the Triumphant Victor risen, glorified, irresistible, since He is that to all eternity! But in the earliest days it was not even over that they pored and brooded, but on the Master whose life seemed to them a flame of joy, and His message a thing not to be gravely repeated in bald prose, but rather sung to the lilt of an adoring thankfulness. And so in the Catacombs they drew Him, these hunted folk, expressing what their hearts had found in Him, as a young, boyish shepherd, with a happy, eager face, a lamb upon His shoulder, and pipes, with a sweeter, deeper, far more satisfying note than Pan's, within His hand. To them to think of Christ called up such words as youth, and energy, and gladness, and music. Had He not made them, who had been so weakly and decrepit, young again? Had He not taught them a new song, the like of which no heart had ever sung before? Was not His friendship one long happiness? And there are many still whom we could win for Him, if we would let them see a Christ like that!

Are we not bound, indeed, to do so, out of common honesty? A persistent libel represents John Knox as lean and gloomy, even Browning calls him "sour":

and yet the records prove that the man was really plagued by a Puck-like sense of humour, that the thing bubbled out, before he knew, in the most disconcerting way and in the most unlikely places. So he confesses, and apologizes for it half-shamefacedly, yet even as he does so, his eyes are still twinkling at the recollection of it, and the lips will not keep firm, but are upon the point of breaking into a new smile over it. And, in the same way, it is pure caricature that thinks of your really religious man as a kind of Quaker soul, dressed in perpetual sober grey. In point of fact the Quaker seriousness and lack of singing are abnormalities, of very noble souls no doubt, still abnormalities. Religion, when it is not stagnant, is like a burn in summer sunshine, all a sheen of glory, all a murmuring of happiness that cannot keep from song. And My message, says Christ, is "living water"; it dances, it flashes, it ripples, it sings. So it is everywhere. The really spiritual Muhammadans live in a kind of a rapture all their days at the bewildering goodness of God. Buddha, whom stupid people think so grave of face, roundly declared that no one who had really grasped his message could be gloomy-hearted; nor, said he, is it possible to reach the true goal of life unless happiness is one of the wings that lift you to it! And is it not more than a little unfair to our Lord that, whereas in His own day those who really saw Him often turned away from Him because He was so gay of heart, well-meaning blunderers ever since, seeking to bring Him into conformity with the type of a supposed religious person in such people's minds, have all too often so misrepresented Him that nowadays many of those to whom He did appeal in His own life feel no pull on their hearts towards one whom, if they saw Him as He really was, they could not

resist. Even that healthy-minded man of genius, Neil Munro, stumbles into some silly chatter in his *Fancy Farm*: "No saint, remember; saints are for the most part women, invalids, and elders!"—a queer travesty of history, which shows that holiness is no mere yellowing of the energies of life, sure sign that autumn is upon one, and the flowers all over now, save for a few frost-bitten stragglers, and the leaves ready to fall; but that, whenever religion wins triumphs in the world, it is through laddies, hardly more, joyously spending their lives upon large ends, and throwing them away with a song on their lips, as I have heard my own battalion go singing into a grim action, from which only a handful of them emerged unscathed, but with the line saved. Christ's message to us is the gospel, the shout of good news: and good news makes faces brighten, chases the dark shadows from the heart. Watch that mother when the doctor tells us that her child will live! "And," says Paul, "the fruit of the Spirit is happiness." If you are dull and dowie and morose, it is quite clear to him you have not really heard the thing at all. For every one who does, so he declares, is recognizable by this as almost his chief mark, that, like the Master, he is strangely sunny-hearted in a difficult world, with much to puzzle and perturb in it.

And yet really there is no mystery about it; for Christ Himself tells frankly both the how and the why. There are indications, indeed, that He found life a thing good in itself. He loved Nature, He delighted in his fellow-men, to Him this world of ours was full of interests, often He was notably pleased and grateful over many things that would have set us whimpering with acute self-pity. Nothing could be more unlike the thought of Christ than the sad conclusion to which

Anatole France's M. Bergeret found himself being forced: "I am not far from being convinced that life, at any rate in the form which it presents on earth, is the result of a disease in the constitution of the planet, that it is a morbid growth, a leprosy, something loathsome in fact which would never be found in a well-constituted healthy star." Christ's was a mind that would, so one imagines, have turned to look again at Borrow's gipsy. "Life is sweet, brother!" "Do you think so?" "Think so! There's night and day, brother, both sweet things; sun, moon, and stars, brother, all sweet things; there's likewise a wind on the heath. Life is very sweet, brother." "In sickness, Jaspar?" "There's the sun and stars, brother!" "In blindness, Jaspar?" "There's the wind on the heath, brother." But Christ's eyes always travelled from the gifts to the Giver; He went about wondering at the beauty of God's mind, at the liberality of His nature, at the glory of this home that He has given us, at the crowding interests He has thought out for us, at the joys that He has sown so lavishly everywhere beside our path, that we can gather them with both hands and in great bunches. Always what made life to Christ was His knowledge of God. Standing there at the end of it, and looking back, He saw what He had always seen, and said what He had always said, that it is only God that gives glory and majesty and gladness to this being of ours; that were He away, even if everything else could somehow remain the same, nothing would be the same; but the sun would have set, and we sit shivering miserably in a night of Arctic cold, not worth the having. It is because we know God, and live in His presence, and are surrounded by an atmosphere of His unfailing kindness, because He dreams such glorious things for

us, and works them out on our behalf so marvellously, that Christ's heart was athrill with happiness. Yet there are those who are afraid of God, shrink from Him, wishing that He were away, and that there were no God to bother them! Nobody can forget the death-bed of poor, frail, likeable, foolish, sinful Falstaff. "For after I saw him fumble with the sheets, and play with flowers, and smile upon his finger-ends, I knew there was but one way; for his nose was as a sharp as a pen; and he babbled of green fields. 'How now, Sir John!' quoth I; 'what, man! be of good cheer!' So he cried out, 'God, God, God!' three or four times. Now I, to comfort him, bid he should not think of God; I hoped there was no need to trouble himself with any such thought yet! So he bade me lay more clothes on his feet: I put my hand into the bed and felt them, and they were as cold as any stone." No doubt that is unusual; only once have I seen any one the least afraid to die; and yet many are irritated that there is a God, this will that clashes against their own, this Other intruding into their life, overturning and directing and upsetting—live as far from Him as they can, thinking of Him as a tremendous fact that must some time be faced, though happily not yet! And yet to Christ who knew Him as none other ever did, God is the one glory of life: and religion not a cloud, overcasting things with dimness and a shadow, as when the sun is hidden, and the golden world turns cold and grey, but rather summer bursting in on a bare earth. Pascal declares, with unwonted heat, that the hopes of religion are so glorious that to see people drifting along and taking no pains to think out whether they be really true, fills him, he says, with a kind of fury. "The thing is astonishing, monstrous. It frightens me."

Think, cries Bagehot, laying his finger shrewdly on that great defect of *Paradise Lost* that Satan is the really interesting person in it, think how it would be if this were true, "if the author of evil in the universe were the most attractive being in it," and sin the most fascinating thing in all the world! Many seem to hold as a first axiom that that of course is so, that holiness is a dull affair, and God's company intolerably dreary, and that for colour and vividness and interest you must look elsewhere. And yet religion is the romance of life. Beside its stupendous hopes and offers, those of the world are cheap and tame beyond expression, mere dusty sun-bleached nothings out of the window of a petty village shop. Its interests are so absorbing, its adventures are so daring, boldly to throw down one's immortal soul as stake, audaciously to pit oneself against the old experienced wily powers of darkness, those experts in temptation that know every weakness of a human heart, to call on God Himself to help, and feel that He is really there, to fling oneself into the saving of the world, and have a real share in it, nothing in the whole full earth has anything approaching such a thrill, or can be so exciting! And often what struck Christ as He looked out over lives with no place for God in them, was how insupportably dull they looked! "I am come," He once cried, "to save you from that stupid boredom which you miscall life; that you may share the joy I know; and that your joy so low and muddy, as things are, may be filled full."

And has He not the right? For, think out some of the happinesses that must have belonged to Jesus Christ, and that in a measure no other ever shared! To begin with, His utter unsuspicious valiant faith in God did this for Him, that that whole teasing side of things

that heaps itself into so much uneasiness for most of us, all that we know as fretting and anxiety, and half a dozen other plagues, for Him all that just did not exist. But try to conceive how glorious a thing life would be if these were all away, if there were no dread in it, and no worry, and no carewornness! And for Christ there was none. He too had to walk by faith, and sometimes He too did not understand, and often sore blows fell upon His heart, and in the utter darkness He felt for His Father's hand to steady Him, but it never occurred to Him to doubt God, or to wonder if He were not forgetting or making a mistake, as we seem apt to do. Buddha used to say that one of the greatest hindrances that we have to encounter is "worry and flurry," that bustle of mind and body, that anxiety of spirit, that so frays our peace and so absorbs our energies, meant for far other things. There is a psalmist, who gazed half-quizzical and half-astonished at the rush of careworn desperate people jostling through the streets, all as earnest about things as if they had no God at all to care for them, and were entirely dependent on themselves. Yet, he asks with a smile, what do you gain by all these fussy, hard-breathing exertions of yours but the merest small dust of the balances? None of the big things can be earned, all of them come to you as gifts. "I did not find my friends," says Emerson; "the good God gave them to me." Yes, says the Psalmist, we hold all that matters by that title. Night by night you fall asleep, and morning after morning waken up, to find God has been bending over you in love, and has left large gifts on your pillow, laid there by His own hand. Cannot you trust Him? Surely He has earned the right to that! And Christ too, noticing how fretted and uneasy-minded we are, asks if

we have clean forgotten we are children with a Father to take care of us, that we are so serious over our poor ploys, as if there really were no more for us than our tiny toy cups and our dolls' dishes hold, as if there were no divine faithfulness behind us. "Your Father knows that you have need of all these things," so He said; and so He lived, doing His part with thoroughness, but never doubting God; making His plans, but, if they broke, looking up unafraid into God's face, and saying, like Epictetus, but with still more joyous and ungrudging surrender, "Do with Me what Thou wilt, for I know that what Thou choosest for Me is better than what I could choose"; and so walked in sunshine where the birds were always singing, with a peace in His heart He saw with pity others did not share, and with a joy, deep, satisfying, constant, other poor souls did not know. And oh, He felt, if only I could make them see things as they are, that they might have this too.

Or again, try to think out what it must have meant to have a mind as clean as Christ's, a record as untangled, a service of God so whole-hearted: never to have known the gnawing of conscience, never to have had that wretched sense that we have failed in duty, no blundering and missing of the path through carelessness, no waste of precious time in groping the way back, sick at soul, and irritated with ourselves. How real God must have been to one so pure in heart that He could see Him as none other ever did; how glorious the comradeship with One so manifest, so near, so obviously there! Those highest moments to which we rarely attain, like the last talks of Augustine with his mother, to which he ever afterwards looked back with awe, since for one moment they seemed almost to have

broken through into eternity and the open vision of God, are but dim shadows of our Lord's perennial and settled mood. There is nothing in life, thinks Wordsworth—and who of us does not agree with him?—like the smile that plays round the stern lips of duty when she is obeyed, and Jesus always saw that: while Renan talks of the "ineffable joy of renouncing joy," and Christ, whose whole life was an eager flame of joyous self-sacrifice, knew that, as no other ever did. "The Son of Man who is in heaven," He once said, as the shadow of the cross fell on His path, in heaven even here. For heaven is a character, and Christ possessed it while upon the earth, and therefore even here lived in the heaven that it constitutes; knew here the glories to which faithful souls attain at last, when they win home; had here that joy to something of which the redeemed burst in. Is heaven not called in Scripture "the joy of the Lord," what they had seen in Christ? "Happiness," said Aristotle, "is the bloom that lies upon a life of goodness." And upon this most perfect of all lives, it must have lain as on no other.

Or, to take one more aspect of an endless theme, knowing God as He did, what splendid hopes Christ harboured, and in what a fascinating world He lived! Open Hardy, and what strikes one is in what a dull and sunless earth he moves. These sad haunting eyes of his appear to see so little, except the manure heaps in the corners of the fields; and manure is so uninteresting, in a world in which there are so very many flowers and stars! But Christ's earth was so glorious. Had you and I walked down the street with Him, we should not likely have seen much to impress us—a man haggling about the purchase of five sparrows, insisting that the fifth must be tossed into the bargain in a halfpenny

deal, whereat we would have looked contemptuously at the mean old wretch : a beggar lying yonder in the shadow, all sores and rags and vermin, from whom we would have held ourselves well back ; some people hurrying past, with vacant-looking faces. That is what we might have seen. But Christ was walking in a wonderful world of endless possibilities : that old scamp was to Him an immortal soul, that beggar a bundle of infinite probabilities, these aimless-looking folk great beings, or, if not that as yet, they might change into that at any second, for the love of God was beating down on them, and, under its rays, these sorry grubs might become glorious-winged creatures ; and Christ kept watching for it hopefully, for always it might happen now ! He meets two burly broad-shouldered fishermen with huge muscles knotted from long hauling at their ropes and nets, irascible and tempery, until the thing had grown into a byword, and He is sure that with them He could win the world, which to you and me looks most unlikely. He lights upon another older man, a lovable soul, but fickle to a degree and wholly undependable, so people held. And "you are a great rock of a man," He says ; "and on you I could build a church." He sees a hated little wretch perched on a tree to see Him pass, and instantly it strikes Him that a State official boyish enough to be there, and with that wistful something in his face, might even yet be won, and risks His chance with a whole wildly cheering city on that huge improbability. And the amazing thing is that what no one else saw was really there, and what Christ said was possible came true. But how thrilling and exciting and splendid life must have been in a glorious world like that, where God was always close beside Him, doing such amazing things ; how happy one

would be living like that, always upon the edge of such stupendous possibilities. No wonder that Christ, knowing God like that, found life a fascinating thing, and gave Him thanks for it.

And He presses you to come, and share His gladness with Him. I know, He says, that you want to be happy, everybody naturally does, and they are right. Only you have gone so far astray in your search for it! And I know that I can give it you, because I know that I have had it all My days; and with that He points the way to it, steep and long and straight, in the Beatitudes. And are you going to turn away, back to your own dull life? The folk of the New Testament are even here far the happiest people in the world, and that because they have been with Christ. And when they talk of heaven what is it that they say? We do not know much of what may be coming, they confess; but there they are with Christ, and we who lived with Him for years can testify that that means hearts that sing for very happiness. If Christ is there, they will be all a rapture, and a breaking into song, and a sheer gladness. For He, the sunniest of hearts, was ever the most generous: and He will give His joy to them, till their joy is filled full.

XIII.

GOD'S LOVE OF GALLANTRY.

"These all died in faith, not having received the promises."—HEB. xi. 13.

WHAT would you say is God's favourite virtue, the thing in all this wonderful universe of His that gives His heart most pleasure? In answering that, this writer, always the most audacious in the Testament, goes his own daring and original way, yet builds up a conclusive case. Boldly he appeals to history, confidently he marshals endless facts and summons crowds of witnesses, draws up his shining roll of spiritual fame, and bids us note that all the saints, whatever be their century, the crudest and the most highly developed of them, however they may differ from each other, have one common characteristic: that what makes them saints, what causes God's heart to run out to them, and His eyes to follow them proudly, is a certain intrepidity of spirit, call it what you will, a reckless gallantry of soul, a valiant way of thinking about life and using it, an heroic belief in the best and the highest, that flings itself undauntedly against gross, solid, seemingly unchangeable facts, and will never admit defeat; a burning up of all one has, and all one is, in the hot flames of an enthusiasm for righteousness that amounts to a passion; a dogged

persistency of effort towards the highest that one knows, even when it looks demonstrably vain and foolish to try any longer. What is religion? asks this man; and answers, it is a loyalty that cannot be broken; it is a stubborn courage that if need be will live through endless disappointment, and lifelong delay, and still hold on; it is an obstinate heroism that in the "teeth of clenched antagonisms," whether it succeeds or seems to fail, and whether there be much or little to encourage it, or indeed just nothing at all, will dourly and recklessly and hopefully "follow up the worthiest, till it die." All which of course is far more manifest in the Author and Finisher of our faith than in any of His servants. For here, as always, Jesus leads the way, and the best and biggest of the rest of us trail along lamely, far behind. Art has drawn the strangest caricature of Him, a beautiful figure, but somewhat effeminate, and to that extent surely with small resemblance to the Face and Character that look at us out of the Gospels! For, did we come to our Lord's life for the first time, probably what would strike us most forcibly in the beginning would be the sheer audacity of His daring, both physical and moral.

> "To suffer woes that hope thinks infinite,
> To forgive wrongs darker than death or night!
> To love and bear: to hope till hope creates
> From its own wreck the things it contemplates,
> Neither to change, nor falter, nor repent,"

that, says Shelley, is what makes true goodness and real greatness.

And are not the massed splendours of his far-off and imaginary ideal the bald prose and the bare facts stated with cold, statistical accuracy, of the life of Jesus? Think of the courage of a village Carpenter laying aside

His tools, standing there, pulling the cottage door behind Him for the last time, really facing His unthinkable task which would have paralysed our mind, of saving a whole world, He all alone! But how could it be done? What should He try? And where should He begin? And what chance was there that His voice could carry any distance, in the noise and hubbub everywhere? Or consider the boldness of the plan on which He mainly relied: give Me some dozen men, plain, ordinary men, with some interest in spiritual things; let them live beside Me for a year or two, and drink in something of My mind and Spirit—even a very little will be enough—and I will win the world! Well! He got them, and a queer unpromising company they seemed! But Christ's indomitable mind started at once and hopefully with that impossible-looking lot! Remember such facts as the calm in which He faced that ugliest and cruellest of things, an Eastern mob swept away by its passions; or the courage with which He met unpopularity and failure, and this after a first rush of success that seemed the forerunner of triumph; the quietness with which He went back to Jerusalem, with the disciples pulling themselves together as they followed, feeling with grim certainty that this meant the end: the awesome majesty with which He bore Himself all through that terrible day when, as the Gospel of Peter has it, they were haling Him to and fro "at a run," amid boisterous shouts of "This is the honour wherewith we honour the Son of God": and that converted that unspeakable final shame into the chief glory of a world, so full of superb actions. "Let us also go that we may die with Him," cried Thomas, gazing up in admiration at the valour of his Master. And, all the generations down, myriads of souls have caught a like

inspiration from Christ's courage, till the faith has a splendour of heroism that not patriotism itself can outtop, or even match. "A great man is great," says Newbolt, "not because he happens to have adventures, but because he is the cause of adventures; to meet him is itself an adventure, and makes a change in those who experience it."

And think of the appeal Christ made to men and women! He had many, but His favourite was to their chivalry and valour. Often He underlines the difficulties of discipleship, warns us what it will cost, that it means risk and loss and sacrifice, and pulling hard against fierce currents; and then He turns and looks at us, with that honouring trust of His in us that sets the blood tingling, and makes the cheeks flush with pride. That, He says quietly, is why I am so sure that you will come: you are too big to keep out of it! And, indeed, in His own day, it was only daring and adventurous spirits who would risk declaring for Him, as it is only daring and adventurous spirits still who have the pluck to try to follow so original and unpopular a Master in the real living out of life. It must be so, this writer says. For the essence of religion is an unbreakable courage that holds doggedly to the belief, in spite of much disheartening experience, that anything may happen in this wonderful world, and that, where God is, the best is the most probable; and with that he overwhelms us with an avalanche of unanswerable data.

Nowhere in literature will you find a bolder plea for gallantry, for big-heartedness, for idealism; a more confident assurance that it is only while and so long as we keep dreaming the audacious dreams that life appears to prove impossible, that we are really sane;

that your man of sturdy common sense who boasts that he, at least, has no illusions and sees things bluntly as they really are and walks on solid earth, is so stupid a creature as to be barely credible; that the too ethereal visions that won't weave into the drab grey stuff of actuality are far nearer the ultimate reality of things than his crude obvious staring facts; and that a life succeeds only in so far as one remains faithful to these seeming insubstantialities, still holds to them, and still believes in them, and still remains undauntedly confident—in spite of years of failure and resultlessness or little more—that in the end they all must, and will, come true; and so keeps working, hopefully and expectantly, for what others have long ago peevishly pushed from them as a manifest and proved impossibility—as what no doubt ought to be, but evidently cannot be, in this disillusionizing earth. It is such souls that keep the world alive, that make progress possible, that bring pleasure to God's heart at sight of the bigness and gallantry of the great creature that His hands have fashioned.

After all, says this Scripture, who were these ancestors of ours who so pleased God; what was it in them that commended them so signally to Him, that He felt here at last is a little knot of men and women such that through them I can reach and bless the whole round world; what was the quality in these primitive people's characters that gave God His opportunity and His chance?

Somewhere in the neighbourhood of Ur, that vast manufacturing city, a group of ardent spirits stumbled somehow on a noble conception of life, of the lofty uses to which it can be put, and, sickening of the grossness and the low ideals round them, dreamed, like the

Pilgrim Fathers thousands of years later, of a new, clean land, free from this pollution that was choking them, where their souls could breathe, and where they could offer a worthy service to a holy, gracious, worthy God. And, seeing, they rose up, left all, and followed, never doubting that they would reach their goal; for it was God Himself, they felt, who was calling them, and His hand that kept tugging urgently at their sleeves, and His own voice that, with explicitness and in so many words, had promised them the fair land of their dream. And yet the long years came and went, and absolutely nothing happened; no foot of land did they possess, except some purchased graves. The young heads that had dreamed the dream had become white; the little stock of years in which it was possible was rapidly shrinking and dwindling to nothingness; and still, a little clan of Bedouin shepherds or the like, they were blown about an inhospitable, and, for them, homeless world. Every one else laughed at the mad adventure, which had ended as all sane people had always known it would, in just nothing at all; at the huge hopes and the meagre results. But they themselves never wavered; hoped, believed, waited in a hush of expectancy for what might come at any moment—on to the very end; and went out at last still believing confidently in what they had never realized. "These all died in faith, not having received what was promised them"; tricked, cheated, empty-handed, poor duped fools, their gorgeous cloud palaces proved to be what, for all their colouring, every reasonable mind had always known they were—mere banks of wet, dank, clammy mist! They were so sure; they would not be convinced; they held to it so obstinately; and, in spite of all their dogged certainty, they were quite wrong.

And so it always is, cry many cynical or desponding voices. Experience brings disillusionment; a little knowledge of life, and the big dreams go out and leave only ashes, cold, black, dead! Who ever started with a fairer vision of mankind than Shakespeare? Who ever ended with a sourer and more bitter view? Who ever had more glorious visions than John Keats? Yet Haydon tells us that the last time he saw him he was lying in bed, a hectic flush upon his cheeks, sore at the treatment he had received, disgusted at the whole affair of life, going out with a contempt for this world, and no hope of any other! Better face facts! What are all your gallantries and your self-sacrifices except foolishness? What comes of your confident hopes for the amelioration of this stubborn world, that does not want to be uplifted, shakes off your helping hand angrily, and so turns back again to its sottish slumbers? And do not all the panaceas, heralded triumphantly as the universal cure for every ill providentially discovered at last, fizzle out, one by one, like all their predecessors? Always we are so sure, and always little or nothing comes of it; always we start so hopefully, and always we fail.

Fail! "What's failure or success to me? I have subdued my life to the one purpose whereto I had ordained it," says Browning's "Paracelsus." What's failure or success to us? If we see the vision and hold to it, if we have some home-sickness for God's best and will not take anything lower in exchange for it; if, like Columbus with the angry clamour growing round him, we still gaze steadfastly westward, with eyes fastened hungrily on the grey blank of sea and sky, are still sure of the land which to every one else has been proved a mere stupid and impossible myth; if we can

gain something of the spirit of the Master, the wonderful Master, who believed that this poor world could be won back for God, that He could do it, and started on it hopefully; and when the popularity died down and the people deserted Him and all men's laughter rang out in His ears, held on without a tremor; and, even when He saw that the end must be a hangman's gibbet, argued, "Well, if so, somehow it will come that way," "I, if I be lifted up, . . . will draw all men unto Me"; and died at last, there in the darkness round the Cross, without one soul that understood, still doggedly believing, and with the shout of a conqueror, "It is finished! It is done!"; if we can keep our hopes alight, and our faith glowing, and our courage undiminished, can die still believing in what we never saw, still sure that this is God's world, and that He must win in the end, then our life also, though it seems to have nothing to show for it, has been lived on a big plan, and has effected far more to help others round about us than we ourselves can credit; has awakened frank and open admiration in God's heart. "Thomas, because thou hast seen Me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed."

That seems to be the type of faith that Christ is asking from us in our day. Sometimes He healed with a touch; at other times things moved more slowly, as in the case of that blind man groping his way through Jerusalem, feeling himself no doubt a crazy object and a laughing-stock with his mud-bedaubed eyes, and sorely tempted to turn back; sometimes it was more tardy still, as in the case of the ten lepers, surely, after our Lord's own, perhaps the most astounding faith in the whole Testament. "Go, show yourselves to the priest," said Christ. And that was only done when one

was healed: to dare into his presence earlier would mean that one was stoned back to one's solitudes again. And yet they went, the whole ten of them, and stood to it, though they had only to look at one another to see clearly the familiar hideous scars and ravages, all there as usual. And not one of them all stood still and cried, "But you are not healed! no! and no more am I! and I for one will not be fooled for one step farther!" "He said it," they held to it obstinately; "He told us to go"; and, as they went in that brave faith of theirs, somehow it happened on the way. Perhaps we too feel that we do not see much to encourage us. "I do not envy those who have to fight the battle of Christianity in the twentieth century," wrote Marcus Dods. "Yes, perhaps I do, but it will be a stiff fight." Of course he did, and anybody with his valiant spirit would. There was a day when our Lord passed through cheering streets wildly enthusiastic; and another day when He watched the crowds deserting Him, till even the disciples themselves seemed to be swithering, and He looked at them sadly, "Will you also go away?" He said. And Peter strode across the sudden empty spaces widening round Him, and put his back to Christ's. "No!" he cried; "there are two of us at least," and faced the world, Christ's poor minority of one. I would rather have been Peter then than one of the shouting mob. And to-day, perhaps, we may get our chance of that.

Yes, but it is so easy to lose heart, to grow discouraged, to fall into step with others, to allow ourselves to be carried along by the pressure of the crowd, to let the world persuade us it was all a boyish dream, which a little knowledge of life shows to be out of the question and too good to be true, to be hidden away out of sight with some shame of face, like one's childish toys now

that one has grown up. Every one remembers the depressing picture Wordsworth gives of the average mental experience, the glory of the morning fading out into the dull grey of the ordinary day. That is too often true. Every new generation starts, hotly dissatisfied with the world as they find it, and sure that they can put it to rights, but by the time that they are middle-aged they are as prosy and fat and bovine and contented as their predecessors were. The low morning sun lights up a wet sodden earth, and for a little it is all a splendour—the very rain-drops on the fences a glistening glory, the very puddles on the muddy road brave sheets of burnished gold. But the clouds come up by and by, and the day proves as grey and watery as all the yesterdays. Yes, yes, muses Emerson a little cynically, watching a new generation's ardour; but in a little while you also will have "donned the prison uniform" and have adopted "the gentlest asinine expression"! It is no great matter that the young men should see visions, that is natural; but that the old men should still undauntedly be dreaming dreams, that is the glory of the prophet's claim. "For the wettest of wet blankets," said Lord Morley, with his enormous experience of life, "give me the middle-aged man who was most of a visionary in his youth." It is for you and me to see to it that is not true of us at least. Christ called His followers "salt": yes, says an early commentator, for it is for us "to keep the world from putrefying"; to maintain hope, and faith, and gallantry of spirit.

If they had wished, says this great writer, no doubt they might have had opportunity to return. Yes, the way back is always open, and always inviting to tired feet. They could have slunk home to Ur, like the

disciples to Galilee, facing the amused eyes of the long village street, their dreams all out, their hopes all dead, back to the hard, sordid, unpoetic realities of life—hauling nets, and wet cold nights, and the old familiar sights and scenes and smells. Have you noticed how Bunyan emphasizes that, underlining it over and over, how all the way they are met by folk returning—some sad enough, with the glory of things vanished from them; some laughing to think that there are still silly fools chasing what they have long ago satisfied themselves has no existence, all of them broken by life? And how is it with us? Are we as sure that the world can be won as we were before these disappointing years, or have we really come to the conclusion that this dour intractable lump won't fashion as God wishes it to do, and so have stopped trying, washed our hands of it? Are we as eager in our Christian work as we were at the start, when we turned to it so expectantly? Or—Oh, it had no doubt better be put through, but little will come of it! Are we as hopeful of acquiring Christlikeness in our own life and character? Or do we leave the biggest of the promises lying unappropriated, not surprised by their not working out in our own individual experiences, for evidently we are not the stuff out of which saints are made, and even God cannot fairly be expected to make much of us? Has life beaten us? Is all vivid hope out? Or are we still as sure of it as ever; will we die, believing?

It is madness to do otherwise; for, says this writer, long although it has been delayed, it is all true, all really true! Believe me, he cries—and it is the most audacious thing even in the New Testament—if it were not true, God could not face you, could not meet your eyes, would be ashamed to link His name with those

of such intrepid, daring, glorious creatures. For your hopes would be bigger than His realities, and your dreams nobler than His facts, and your longings loftier than He can manage to work out for you. But it is not so. He "is not ashamed to be called their God," because it is all true. No dream once dreamed but in the end it works out into actuality. No most impossible vision but grows really fact at last. "Look at the generations of old," cries a bold writer in the Apocrypha, and judge for yourself, "Who ever trusted in the Lord, and He failed him?" There is not one such case.

What, for example, is this Bible which stands alone in human literature; how did it grow to be? A petty tribe, feeling the pinch of famine, went down into Egypt, remained there for generations, were at length enslaved and cruelly treated, till in the brain of one of them rose the impossible hope of leading that poor huddle of slinking things out of the midst of a great military empire, of fashioning a nation out of that soft crumbling stuff, of winning a place for them in the sun. And somehow it came true; and in process of time they settled down in a tiny land, the size of a few Scottish counties, and that only half won, themselves a primitive people with as yet a crude religion; and in a little while, caught by great international currents, the toy state was blotted out, broken, swept away, and it was over: the brave hopes and the long endeavours had all failed. But no! Here and there among the exiles, lost in the masses of their conquerors, rose valiant voices bidding the fallen people still to hope; and others crooning songs to their sad hearts there in the dark; and some few did straggle back across the deserts to their ruined little capital; but, like a plant exhausted in keeping itself alive, with

no strength to flower, they could do nothing more, remained for years perched there among the fallen débris, an object of derision, apt to be wiped out by any passing caravan; and even in the end it all resulted only in a somewhat cold and formal and official religion, little more in most hearts, so it would appear; till, far down the ages, a laddie reading in the records of His race of one who was to save His people through self-sacrifice, grew surer and yet surer, till He rose up at last, that Sabbath day in the synagogue, and said, "In this the prophet speaks of Me"; and entered on a quixotic enterprise that of course quickly flickered out and came to nothing, though indeed some crazy creatures, chief of them a little bow-legged man with a stammering tongue but with piercing eyes, went up and down the world, with some weird story of a dead man, whom they said was not dead but alive. And what has it all got to do with you and me, that tale of the dim long ago? Only this, that the valiant voices were the prophets who still arrest us in God's name; and those who sang, the Psalmists with their uncanny knowledge of these hearts of ours, and their final expression of our deepest and most secret moods; and the laddie who dreamed the impossible dream our blessed Lord, and the short bow-legged man that Paul whose thinking is the mould into which all our thoughts about religion almost have to run. Dreamers and fools! why, is it not just they who have made far the deepest of all marks upon humanity? And so it is in every age, in every land, in every people. Have you ever stood in the graveyard at the Tower of London, the dust of which is fashioned out of the hottest and most chivalrous hearts of England—the men who dared for us, toiled for us, lived for us, died for us—and it all came

to nothing! But the torch they kindled was passed down the centuries, and others dared and toiled and lived and died; and they too in turn were blotted out. But others rose, and others, and yet others; and at last it all came true, and to-day you and I are free only because they dreamed a hopeless dream, attempted what had been proved, innumerable times, to be entirely impossible.

Or think of Christ declaring that if He be hustled to a gallows He will draw the whole world to Him. Was there ever a more absurd saying uttered by human lips—one more unlikely, one more palpably untrue? And yet as often as you come within sight of the Cross on Calvary, do you not feel that pull, that compulsion, that attraction that you cannot resist? And are you not His man, until the road bends out of sight of it again, and in a little you forget about it all?

It is all true. It is the dreams that are realities, it is the visionaries who have their feet planted upon solid ground, it is the things that are obviously impossible that get done! Up again, up again: for He hath prepared a city for you, as He did for these homeless wanderers. To-day your character is a wild country, filled too often with the sudden inrush of marauding passions, that leave only a splatter of blood, and a black trail of smoke, and the tumbled ruins of your hopes and plans and long endeavours—and this, time upon time, till it seems useless to try any longer. But one day you will live behind strong walls and gates that cannot be forced, a rich and splendid life, beyond the reach of danger, and in full security. Let us hold to our visions even if we have to die believing in what we never actually saw. But surely it is not so. Surely Christ's kingdom comes in, better than His promises, visibly and for all eyes to note it. Still only that

monotonous expanse of sea and sky and vacancy? But—is not that a land bird; and that yonder, is it seaweed, or a branch drifting past? And far ahead there, where the surf is tumbling, is not that something that looks like land at last? Let us still dream our dreams. For, as Cromwell wrote once to his daughter, "To be a seeker is to be of the best sect next to a finder, and such shall every faithful seeker be at the end. Happy seeker! happy finder!"

Stevenson, that doughty fighter, looked wistfully towards Jesus Christ, felt he was not the man for this adventure, and yet cries out in a kind of agony of longing if only, oh, if only this that I can give would do! And his heart's desire comes very near to an entirely satisfying definition of what Jesus means by faith:

"To thrill with the joy of girded men,
To go on for ever, and fail, and go on again,
And contend for the shade of a word, and a thing not seen with the eyes:
With the half of a broken hope for a pillow at night
That somehow the right is the right,
And the smooth shall bloom from the rough:
Lord, if that were enough?"

It is enough to start with, give Him that, and He will take it gratefully. God loves a gallant soul above all others, and, if we face our difficulties and our past unbeaten and unbroken, with dour stubborn souls that will not yield, that keep on trying when it seems to have been proved quite useless, God's heart will fill with open admiration for such valiant creatures; and when we hirple home out of the wars, with no distinctions, poor, muddied, wounded, ashamed figures, Christ, His whole face lit with pleasure, His enthusiasm showing plainly in His eyes, will run to meet us with His hands outstretched in eager welcome, crying, "Well done! oh, well done!"

XIV.

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO CHRIST'S ENEMIES.

"The reproach of Christ."—Heb. xi. 26.

IS there any parallel to the extraordinary fact that the picture of Jesus Christ that has, perhaps, most moved and haunted the world is one that, far from being painted by some devout artist working on his knees, like Fra Angelico, was spat out by a vicious venom that meant to wound and make ridiculous; that it is arguable that the account of Christ that has won most people for Him, that has been most successful in inducing poor ashamed souls, feeling acutely their unworthiness, to pluck up courage to draw near Him, that is most thumbed and studied, and to which, when doubts assail them, or sin pulls them down, discouraged creatures steal back, as to the place where they are likeliest to find something to give them hope again, is, so to speak, neither John nor Luke, neither Mark nor Matthew, but the gospel according to Christ's enemies? Every one knows that those hostile accounts of Socrates, the charges of Meletus, and the broad jokes of Aristophanes, give no authentic account of the man: and there are people about whom we do not speak, because we are aware that we dislike them, and are thereby incapacitated from dealing with them fairly; for it is hatred

that is blind, and only sympathy that understands and sees all that is really there. And yet it is the gibes and insults that they shouted after Christ upon the streets that His followers prize, as giving the deepest insight into His work and character; the ugly libels, whispered by unclean minds at the cross-roads, and wherever knots of men were gathered, that by a strange alchemy have been transmuted into the highest titles of the Son of God, which flame out even yet with a glory that makes the very noblest that the delicate and loving skill of all the ages have fashioned for Him seem almost dim and faded! It is long since they discovered on the wall of a Roman barrack a rude drawing of a grotesque figure on a cross, and a soldier kneeling, with the scribbled legend added, "Alexamenos worships his God!" How easily one can recall the scene—the lounging group of rough soldier lads; the boy among them being baited for his ridiculous religion; the humorist, with the happy knack of drawing, dashing off, amid boisterous shouts from his delighted comrades, that quick sketch that summed up so neatly the whole grotesque absurdity of so impossible a faith. Very human, but surely one would not naturally look for a speaking likeness in a picture, drawn in that lightning fashion, and still more in that spirit of open mockery! And yet, perhaps, the most striking portrait of our Lord is just such a caricature, intended to create a roar of laughter! And all the ages down, many, who had passed through the long galleries, filled with authentic Masters, not greatly impressed, on seeing this stop short, with a catch in their breath, and their hearts running out to Christ, are won! Think it out for yourself, and you will be surprised how often you turn back to it, how instinctively your hand reaches out for the gospel according to Christ's enemies.

Turning its pages, one comes on many things we naturally weave into our prayers and creeds, feeling that they could not be given more fitting expression; upon much that helps to make Christ very dear to us. Here, for example, in the contemptuous remarks with which they tried to shoulder Him aside as a mere nobody, with no stateable claim on any one's attention, do we not somehow get happily near to Him, as elsewhere, owing to His very greatness, it is not always easy to do; feel that He was not some strange Being, far separated from our human nature, whose victory, therefore, means little to us; but a real man, whose amazing triumph may well flush our hearts with hope, for it was won where our campaign has to be fought, and with our very weapons. Here again, in those sneering outbursts, which show how He irritated many people, who, having arranged things in neat bundles, had no intention of taking them all down again and repacking them in order to make room for these new facts they had overlooked—how He vexed stodgy minds by His originality, by His refusal to be bound by mere tradition, by His insistence upon serving God at first hand, and for Himself, is there not real easing for the hearts of many kindly folk, who are continually distressed to find how deep a gulf yawns between them and the previous generation; that their religion, if it is to be honest and their own, just cannot run in the particular grooves in which their father's travelled, that certain doctrines which helped him stumble their feet, that certain habits which he held to be part of man's innate duty, seem to them merely man-made customs, and not very wise at that. And it hurts them to have to hurt those very dear to them. Christ too was a distress to many people; and there is a limit to Paul's

gracious law that if anything in me worries and stumbles others, I will, though holding it legitimate, lay it aside, beyond which in loyalty to God we dare not go. Only, let all of us be sure that we are keeping firmly in our minds that fact that is so easily forgotten, that novelty and progress are not of necessity synonyms; that, as Joubert says, it ought to make us uneasy if we find that "about poetry we differ from the poets, and on religious matters from the saints"; and that that jest of Smetham is not all a jest, that often there is much more noise than real advance, with a young generation filling the world with their lusty crowing, "not really clever, but thinking themselves so, because they spell cockadoodledoo with a k (Kokadoodledoo!)." And yet, turn the leaves of this fifth Gospel and you soon come again on this, how Christ exasperated decent souls who found the world as it is good enough for them, and wanted only to be allowed to doze on in peace; because, as they rasped out to each other, He would "stir up the people," make them dissatisfied, put absurd dreams into their heads. And He did stir them up, and would not cease from that, although He saw that much of the enthusiasm He evoked was, to His disappointment, being diverted into futile channels, and ending in wild madcap schemes which He at once denounced. Still, to Christ, movement is no sinister symptom; it is airlessness that brings dry rot into the soul; nor is there much hope so long as "the whole earth is still and at rest," as the prophet has it in his discouraged report of things; but once there is a going in the tops of the mulberry trees, and the winds are rising, then look up, for God is abroad in the earth, and anything may happen. Which surely ought to hearten us in these wild days of clamour and upheaval and continual

unrest that take the spirit out of many of us, till we stand gazing disconsolately about us and wringing hopeless hands. No doubt at all, now as then, there is much frothy talk and silly thinking; still, said Christ in His brave, hopeful way, watching the bubbles forming and bursting in the leaven tub, behind all this that looks so useless something real is taking shape, and this is proof of it.

Or here, you see, we come on that disgusting libel they hurled after him that he was not a prophet, no, nor even a religious man at all, this glutton, this winebibber! Shocking words, murderous stabs meant to kill! But the Church, and even the world, ignoring the insult as beneath consideration, learns gratefully that at least Christ was no ascetic; that it is silliness and a mere flying in the face of fact to talk of "a pale Galilean," and a world grown grey at His breath; that what struck those about Him was how heartily He threw Himself not only into other people's sorrows, but no less eagerly into their innocent joys; which, thinks Bishop Butler, is a much harder thing to do, giving as proof that, while we have a rich vocabulary of words signifying sympathy and suffering with, we have none, in English, meaning being made glad by another's gladness. Be sure there was no awkward and uncomfortable silence at the wedding in Cana at the part of the table where Christ sat; that He rejoiced with those that did rejoice, feeling their gladnesses His own. Everywhere it is a strong and beautiful face that looks out at us from this sketch drawn by hatred.

But let us concentrate upon three famous passages. And first, here is a place worn thin and brown, you see, by constant handling down the ages. How many gazing wistfully from afar off at Christ, but feeling with regret and shame that He can have no place in His

kingdom for such shabbiness as theirs, upon the point of turning sadly away from what is evidently not for them, have stumbled on it, and with a rush it came home to them "for me too, then, He is a Saviour, and to me also He is willing to become a Friend, this 'friend of publicans and sinners.'"

We have almost forgotten that, originally, that was an ugly snarl, thrown in malice at the disciples, as a disconcerting fact, so damaging as to be really fatal, which they would find it difficult to deny or to explain away, and passed on with a significant shrug, and whispered comments about "like to like," and "judging a man by his company." And yet that sinister innuendo lingered long. The faith never had a cleverer opponent than Celsus; and, of course, he fastens on it, scoffing about this queer Master who, unlike all the rest who naturally desire clean, worthy people round about them, invites the most bedraggled, and will accept any diseased and muddied and impossible thing. Long ago any point there ever was in that became altogether blunted. For it sums up so aptly what we see to be the wonder and glory of Christ, that He, so clean, stoops to befriend the least worthy of us; that those eyes, pure enough to see God face to face, find something likeable in us; yes, and enormous possibilities, that neither we ourselves nor any other ever suspected. Nowadays, indeed, the wheel has swung full circle; and many are inclined to turn from Christ a little haughtily, bidding Him betake Himself to the publicans and sinners who have need of Him, and not press His unnecessary gifts on decent people. For there is truth in John Owen's verdict, that it is nothing but sheer pride that keeps most folk from Christ. Yet surely at times we do feel the wonder of His friendship with us! At a Communion season we peer in

towards His table and His presence wistfully, yet hesitate and falter. It seems not decent for us to come in : not as we are. We must wait till the taint of our sin has been blown away, till we are less unseemly from that foul mud round the swine troughs. And yet how often that kindly, watchful porter, Goodwill, has flung wide the gate, as Bunyan says, assuring us that " we make no objection against any ; notwithstanding all they may have done before they come here, none is excluded." And how often as these urgent hands laid hold on us and drew us in, have we looked up into His face and seen, with wonderment, it was no servant, but the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. " The friend of publicans and sinners ! " How the sneer meets our case, and answers every difficulty ! " You may, if you want, become one of the elect," says St. Ignatius Loyola. Yes, Samuel Rutherford confesses, you seem in an evil plight ; take you " a house next door to the Physician " ; for, he adds, it would be very curious if you should chance to be the very first He ever turned away all down the years. Whatever we may be, He will take that as a beginning ; and out of such impossible material make a heart like His own. " I know it," declares Mary Magdalene ; " And I," cries Matthew ; " And I too," innumerable voices break in, " I too, because He did it for me."

Or, look, here is another passage that has struck the world. The king ! they cried that day in the common hall, The king ! For tidings of the charge had filtered down out of the court-room ; and indeed, judged by the brutal standards of the time, it made an exquisite jest. Some clever creature, always an amusing fellow, and invaluable for his merry quips when time hung heavy and things dragged, surpassed himself. A faded tunic,

that would serve for the royal purple ; and for a sceptre ? Ah ! here was a reed, the very thing, fit symbol of so stable a power ! And now a crown ! These thorns would do ! (" In what sluggard's garden did they grow ? " asked Whyte of St. George's, with a sudden stab !) And, though they pricked fiercely and tore his hands, he wove them into a rough chaplet. And with that, the investiture completed, the room was all a roar of merriment. Down on your knees, men, don't you see the King ? The King ! The King ! And as you look, do you not feel that they have put the truth into the aptest words ; do you not find yourself kneeling in very deed among that noisy rabble, but in all awe and humility, offering Christ the sovereignty of your heart and life ? A queer king and an odd kingdom ! where the greatest is the least, and He upon the throne is the servant of all ! And yet, what can one do with such a claimant ? We can resist the Almighty, poor, puny nothings though we are : we can look Him in the eyes, and dare to defy Him ! But this strange Figure, with the bleeding forehead, does He not master us through very meekness ? Do not our hearts escape us, break away to Him, fling themselves eagerly before Him, crying, " We will have this Man to rule over us." In this presence our boasted and prized liberty becomes impossible. When others give us orders, we take their words into our hands, and turn them round, and consider whether we will honour them, or not. But when Christ speaks, there is no option but obedience, if we are to keep our self-respect : for even when we fail deliberately, we know in our hearts it is open rebellion and sheer infamy. This is the King in very deed ; and our awed souls have to acknowledge His divine rights. Yet, perhaps this passage is not studied, these days, as it

used to be. Even in Covenanting times, Rutherford found that there were those who tried to serve a half Christ; to take His benefits, but overlook His claims. And two of the Victorian prophets bade us remember that the Bible dwells, not on our rights, that favourite word these days, but on our duties. Nothing but Christ's kingship will bring peace into the world: not until we submit to Him, and His strong government, can there come freedom from the enemies that break in and destroy and harry: the Kingdom of Heaven is a monarchy. And, intimate though the relations be between this Master and His people, none the less it is He Himself who says that only those who do whatsoever He commands them are really His friends. Aye! and why should we not, even for our own sake? For it is true, what Francis Thompson tells us, though we may not credit it:

> "Hardest servitude has he
> That's jailed in arrogant liberty:
> And freedom, spacious and unflawed,
> Who is walled about with God."

But most impressive of all is that cheap sneer they flung upon Calvary, in which, all unconsciously, they waded to the most profound of moral facts, to the first law of life, and to the very heart of the secret of that power which the Lord Christ exercises over folk of every age and land. They were not easy in their minds; for even yet, they felt uncomfortably, they might still be discomfited in the most awkward and public way; and things be left far worse, instead of better. But, as the slow hours passed and nothing happened, and Christ's strength grew visibly weaker, their mean souls took to exulting, not so much over their dying enemy, as over their own dead fears. "Ah, ha! friend," they

scoffed up into our Saviour's face, "myths and fakes will not serve you here!" "If you are God's Son, as you say, then why does He not help you? Let us see just one miracle! Only one. Here is a fair and open test. Come down from the cross, you who are such a wonder-worker! A likely story! Of course there is nothing in it! Save others? why He cannot even save Himself!" At the time, perhaps, that seemed effective and convincing: yet how silly a gibe it really was! For these two things are always incompatible. If you would save others, you must understand you cannot save yourself. Look at a doctor who is wrestling for a life, how white and tired he is! Always the virtue with which he heals his patients passes from himself, and leaves him worn and spent. If you wish to do anything with life, says Christ, throw it away in service with no thought of self: for let that last intrude into your mind, and you are sure to waste it. "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone; but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit." And, once Christ directs our eyes to that, the evidence of it is written everywhere. It is out of date to describe Nature as a mere horrid cockpit; as a savagery of competition, each one for itself, and the devil welcome to the hindmost. In point of fact it is not size and force and sheer brutality that have succeeded. The animals apt to survive have been those who thought, not only of themselves, but of their commonweal, and lived in packs; or whose young have the longest period of infancy, and make the most severe claim on the parents' affection and self-sacrifice. And the higher that one rises, the surer does that grow. The trail into any new truth or discovery is always marked for us by the bleached bones of intrepid explorers, who threw away

their lives in the quest. The progress of humanity in every department is like that of that mediæval Russian army, which found its progress barred by a broad, deep impassable moat; whereat the front ranks, without hesitation leaping boldly in, built up a bridge with their dead bodies, over which their comrades, following, swept on to triumph. If like David, gazing almost fearfully at the water that had cost so much, feeling it to be really blood, a thing too sacred for mere common use, we offered what costs human life to God, we would need to heap up everything before His altars. For what do we get at a lower price?

But it is in the things of the soul that this law is most evident of all. Understand, says Carlyle, holding out the records of the cruel treatment meted out in every generation to those to whom under God the earth owes most, that if you wish to help the world, you must not expect any payment in its markets. And, indeed, all our saviours have saved us, only by reckless disregard of their own interests. And He who is the Saviour, and who stands alone, has as the fitting symbol of His power a hangman's cross! "He saved us," says Newbolt, of a British General who, in the Great War, extricated us from sheer irretrievable disaster, "he saved us, by being himself." And upon Calvary Christ saved us by being Himself, by throwing His own life away there also as He always did for every one that met Him, great or small. "How is it," muses Montefiore, with his frank, open mind, "that this faith, that began so inauspiciously, has won such triumphs and spread through the earth?" And answers that its secret must be found in these three words, "For Jesus' sake." And that is true, and why?

Ask Paul, and he will tell you, though with difficulty,

for the man's voice breaks and catches in a sob, "He loved me, and He gave Himself for me." Gross and material though it seem, Thomas did blunder on the final proof. "Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, I will not believe." And no more would the world have done, had these marks not been there. To win me, to melt the hardness in my heart, to set my will in motion, to save my poor soul, He threw His life away; that is what makes Christ irresistible. It is because He did not save Himself, we recognize our Saviour.

Yes, says Christ; and in anything I did there is nothing unusual, except in degree. You too must spend your lives like that, if they are to have any value. My poor friends, He replied to them, when they broke in hotly, protesting at the very suggestion of Him tossing away His life, you too will need to take your cross and follow where I lead; for you are saved, not by one, but by two; not by Mine only, but by yours as well. The mystics always tell us that the gospel story has no power for us till it is reproduced again within our character. There too must Christ be born; there also must He grow to manhood; there too must He do many mighty works and gracious acts of healing; there in the death of our old nature there must be another crucifixion; and in our rising into a new higher life another Resurrection. And till, however they may coax and plead, however they may writhe and struggle, we nail down our evil ways on to Christ's very cross with bitter blows; and sit watching, with hard, unfeeling eyes that will not waver into pity, till they die, we are not Christian men and women. For our Lord has adopted Thomas's test, and applies it to us: "Unless," He says, breaking in upon our loud

professions of discipleship, "unless I see in your hands the print of the nails, I will not believe." And yet, where are they? In our soft, white palms, and easy pampered lives, and comfortable characters, where are the nail-prints that alone prove that we have caught Christ's spirit, and are really His?

XV.

FOR THOSE WHO HAVE STOPPED TRYING.

"God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through Him might be saved."—JOHN iii. 17.

FABER, that subtle expert in things spiritual, with his uncanny knowledge of the working of these intricate hearts of ours, lays it down with unusual assurance that of those who fail in religion the great majority do so, not as we would suspect from a certain flippancy of spirit whose real interests are elsewhere, nor from a timidity that trips over some silly doubt or stupid little difficulty that has been met a thousand times, losing Christ for just nothing at all, nor even from an over-confidence that takes things much too lightly, but through sheer depression and a daunted feeling that it has been proved to be no use, in their case at least. At the best, things turn out not at all what they had expected: they had supposed that one pitched battle would bring matters to a decisive issue, and that thereafter there would be little more than the hunting down of broken groups of disheartened failings, too cowed to make any serious fight of it; that, and the procession through the cheering streets: and it is with dismay that they waken up to discover that they are immersed in a prolonged campaign of

dull trench warfare, wherein from day to day not much that is vital seems to happen, till growing heartsick of the mud and the shelling, and the dour stand, and the brave rushes that appear to make no appreciable difference on the long lines as a whole, they patch up a poor compromise of a kind of makeshift and dishonourable peace, and slink off home. Or things go wrong more tragically, and they fling down their weapons, surrender to themselves, stop trying, assume hopelessly that nothing further can be done, and let the fierce currents of their nature drift them where they will. So is it souls go down. And certainly there is much in the Gospels to corroborate that view. Continually Christ found people who had made a sorry mess of things; and, while He spoke to them gravely, hiding, condoning, minimizing nothing, there is not that note of severity that we would have employed. Almost always He seems to have felt that what they needed to enable them to pull themselves together, and redeem their aimless souls and feckless, futile, sinful lives, was a word of hope and good cheer and encouragement, and this even in cases that to us look callous and hardened and impudently inexcusable. And the amazing results that followed His treatment prove that He was right. The Gospels are crammed with instances, none of them quite the same as any other; for, as the Sufis say, "The ways of God are as the number of the souls of men." And till we grasp that fact, that God's methods are not stereotyped; that, as Fraser of Brea came to see with relief, and so at last got his head above his difficulties, our soul is not "to hang at any man's girdle," nor our experience to be a mere duplicate of any other's; but that God deals with us individually, one by one, and in every case with a new touch of

originality, we shall often be puzzled and unhappy. But in all the gospel instances of Christ's methods with those who had stopped trying, there are certain underlying similarities. Let us take one of them, that of the woman of Samaria, and see what we can find in it to shame and hearten us.

It is a bonnie story, bonnily told: so full, that one can but wander through it for a little as in a garden in its midsummer glory, plucking a blossom here and there until one's hands are full, and yet, look! we have made no difference on the mass of splendour left untouched! Evidently, the writer was himself greatly impressed by it; he devotes much space to it; he fills it in with an elaboration of detail; he felt it was God's own hand laid on the Master's arm that led Him through the glare of the hot sunshine and by dusty roads to that well, drowsing there in the heavy noonday stillness. "He needs must go through Samaria," he says. Yet it was not the inevitable route. For the national animosity between Jew and Samaritan was apt to bicker up into a sudden gleam of steel, a scuffle, and an ugly murderous stab. And many people took the other somewhat longer road.

But Christ had chosen this. And, looking back, the writer feels that it was not a whim but a divinely given instinct that had guided Him to where a poor sinful soul had need of Him, and of those clever hands so cunning to mend what is broken, and put together what every one else would have tossed aside as irretrievably smashed. And there is hope for us in that. Wherever there is need, there Christ is sure to be. For, as some creatures can sense the sea from miles away, and make their unerring way to it over long wastes of hot and trackless sand, so, wherever there is a breaking

heart, or a sick soul, or a life tangled and knotted and soiled, there we can count on Christ. He needs must find His way to you, and He will.

It was a tashed, worthless-looking thing He came upon by the well-head ; not without something likeable in her—does any one lack that ?—with some pathetic traces of the old wit and alertness that had once made her popular, but faded now, like her worn beauty. Did you ever think out why it was that she came to the well at the unusual hour of noon, toiling through the fierce sunshine when everybody else was resting ?—an hour so unusual, that certain scholars feel the Evangelist must have employed some other than the common method of reckoning time. Was it to escape the scornful looks of the clean women, always apt to be more cruel in their haughty righteousness than men ? Was it that she was tired of being left alone, while the others chatted friendlily together ? Here, at least, was a soul that had failed in life, and knew it ; though she tried to hide it even from herself. And whom everybody else despised, God loved ; and sent Christ straight to this one lonely, frivolous, sinful, defiant, beaten, most unhappy soul.

And it all happened at the least likely of all possible times. For does not that coming to the well at noon suggest that she had had one of those horrid, hurried days, when everything goes wrong, and duties accumulate in heaps, and the more we hasten, the more we lag ! Rushed and hot and flustered, she was hours late. She should have been there in the evening, or at latest in the cool of the morning ; and yet, on a day abnormally hot, when every one else, their work over, was sitting at their ease, here was she panting out the long, glaring, dusty road. And no doubt she was flurried and tempery.

That first reply, half-jesting no doubt, was at least half-rude, implied no very sweet humour. And it was then that she came upon Christ; then that He found her; not in the coolness of some leisure moment when she had time to think, but when fretted and worried and overdriven and hot. And again there is hope for us in that. You have stopped really trying because you seem to have no chance. The long day at the office, immersed in material things, chokes the soul. "God pity me," cried Jowett of Balliol, "but I cannot keep the thought of God in my mind"; and from your mind also He is crowded out by a mass of things, individually little nothings, but to which you must attend and that seem to leave no room for Him. The hours in the stuffy schoolroom fray your temper, the clamour of the children all the day, and far into the night, saps your energy, makes you quick-tongued or peevish before you are aware; you are so busy that you have no time for spiritual things or God, tumble into bed too tired to pray; and rising, half asleep and still unrested, can only throw a word to Him across your shoulder as you run to begin all that must somehow be put through, and how are you to pack it all into one day! In such an atmosphere as that in which I have to live, you say, no soul could flower. And so I ceased to bother with the straggling, sickly thing, like a rickety plant in the sour soil of some sunless slum street, and let it die, or at least pay it small attention.

But, after all, are you entitled to make that complaint? "In order to dispose our hearts to devotion," says old Bishop Wilson, who had tried both ways of it, "the active life is to be preferred to the contemplative," a startling dictum surely, robbing us of the plaintive and self-pitying excuses we make for ourselves. And

yet there is this fact to be faced that it was in just such circumstances as you say make success a vain dream for you that Jesus won His triumph. Mark shows us very vividly how constantly He lived in the centre of a rush of duties treading on each other's heels, of a press of elbowing, jostling folk, eagerly struggling to get near to Him; how very seldom He could win even an hour's respite from it all; how even when He did contrive to seize a moment's leisure, however remote the spot might be, hardly was He settled down than vulgar trippers, out to see the man of the hour, and with little or no spiritual purpose in their quest, were streaming after Him in mobs, were breaking in almost at once, shouting and pointing and gesticulating "Here He is! Here He is! And, with that, He was back in it all again, the horrid sights and smells of disgusting Oriental illnesses, the heat, the babble, the misunderstanding, giving Himself to each new case with all His soul, never once flaming out that He was sick and tired of the whole lot of them, nor even arguing gently that He must really be allowed some small time to Himself. His was a life so full, and lived at such a pace, that even yet it makes one tired even to read of it. And yet it was the best life ever lived by far. I fear that our excuses will not do! In any case we can be certain Christ will find some way of breaking in to us. It was while Matthew was at the receipt of custom, that a shadow fell across his very money-bags; and a tax office is not the place where one would naturally look for spiritual happenings! It was while some fishermen were at their ordinary job, mending their nets, that the call came to them. It was when she had had a tiring, fretting morning, with everything going wrong as if possessed, that the woman of Samaria came upon Jesus

Christ. Oh! we shall get our chance. For God is far more eager over it than we are. Surely the finest thing Christ ever said is not even the Prodigal, but that even deeper parable where He compares us to a piece of silver lost in the dark, and tells us of God's searching hands, feeling and groping for us, nearer and yet nearer, till they light on us at last. Always we are surrounded by a persistency of grace which, like the sea on the Dutch dykes, keeps feeling and looking for an opening into our lives, and if it find even the smallest one, soaks and sucks and trickles and at last pours in. Without doubt we shall get our chance.

> "Ever and anon a trumpet sounds
> From the hid battlements of Eternity,
> Those shaken mists a space unsettle, then
> Round the half-glimpsed turrets slowly wash again;
> But not ere Him who summoneth
> I first have seen."

You will get your chance.

You note how it began with this defeated soul, with a request from Christ. "Give me to drink," He said, throwing Himself upon her courtesy and charity. And that is worth remembering. For while He has many appeals, that seems to be the one that most touches the rising generation. They are not much interested in Christ's gifts, look a little queerly at His injunctions to prayer and the culture of the spirit, feeling that these things lie outside of their world, that in that rarefied atmosphere they would find it hard to breathe, or at least would feel out of their element, gawky, and self-conscious; they are not sure of immortality; they are not thinking very much about their souls; but they do wish to serve God and their fellow-men, and, when they hear Christ's call to that,

their cheeks flush and their hearts thrill. Oh, no doubt, like Isaiah that day in the Temple, they look back a little wistfully at their own plans for their life; feel, too, that they are incompetent for this, and yet it moves them to be asked. And that is well. For we are all too apt to fall into the sin of Judas, poor muddled soul, who gave himself to Christ largely, it seems, for what he could get out of Him.

But our Lord's appeal is far finer, nobler, higher. Come to me, He said, and "I will make you fishers of men." And those to whom He spoke that knew exactly what it meant. The words called up to them a very vivid and familiar picture, through which they had often lived—early morning on their Highland loch, pitiless weather or grey, trailing mists; or, under a sudden icy gust, huge waves slapping against their boat, and they themselves chilled to the bone, wet through with rain or spray, with numbed hands that could hardly haul; knew that it meant endurance, toil, a hard life of it day by day. Yet it thrilled them that Christ needed them, trusted them, threw Himself upon their help. And is not the most amazing part of Christ's grace to us all, not even what He gives, but that He stoops to take from us, believes in us, is sure that we can help Him, us who have failed so often that we have stopped trying? Well, what do you say now that His eyes are fastened eagerly on you, and He condescends to ask from your soiled hands? Are you going to hug your life close and snarl back that it is your own, and that you mean to use it for your ends, on your own interests, and He must manage as He can. "Give Me!" says Jesus Christ, with outstretched hands, to poor ragged creatures who have failed, throwing Himself frankly on our aid. "Give Me!"

Even so, we must be careful of two dangers in which this woman would certainly have lost her chance, had it not been for our Lord's careful shepherding. To begin with, she misunderstood Christ altogether, had no conception of His greatness, or how vast were the things that had suddenly come within her reach. So material and prosaic and earthbound was she, that all that she wanted was an easier time of it, and some lessening of the monotonous drudgery of life, a lighter task, some increase in her comfort, and some added leisure. "Give me this water," she said, and spare me this long tramp through the hot glare. And that was all she saw in Christ: and, face to face with Him, that was all that she coveted! And to-day are not we all, even in the Church, laying the emphasis on the lesser things in Christ, and leaving the bigger lying unappropriated and unclaimed? The popular preaching for the moment dwells upon social reform. And that is well enough, is a healthy reaction from an indifference that was sinful, a proof that we are learning the lesson that Christ's folk cannot pass by on the other side, unaffected by any wrong or tragedy. The Assembly of the United Free Church have agreed to alter the moving words of the most solemn of the questions asked a minister at his settlement in a charge, "Are not zeal for the glory of God, love to the Lord Jesus Christ, and a desire of saving souls, so far as you know your own heart, your chief motives for seeking to enter into the office of the Holy Ministry," into "a desire for the salvation of men"; and this on the ground, as was explained, that men have bodies as well as souls, and that the Church cannot remain indifferent to physical or economic wrongs. All which, within limits, is excellent. And yet are we not

forgetting that, if Christ is a social Reformer like none other, He is greatly more? He is the Saviour. That is His noblest and most worthy name; and the most wonderful thing He does is to change, not our environment only, but ourselves; to take these poor, lean, starved, sinful hearts of ours, and out of that hopeless-looking rubbish fashion new creatures, clean and strong. No doubt, it is always a shock, as Carlyle said, to find to our dismay that the real seat of our troubles lies within ourselves; that we are not merely unhappy victims who can pity ourselves for our evil hap, but ourselves guilty; that, as Buddha has it in a tremendous passage, the lost soul, as we would put it, when face to face with the Judgment Seat, is forced back by searching questions to admit that it was not its lot, nor its parentage, nor anything outside itself, but it itself by its own choice and action that has brought down doom upon itself. Christ never shirks telling us that, with terrible directness. But, blessed be He, He always adds that He can save us from ourselves, and will. And till we know Him as our Saviour, as One who changes our desires, and breaks our selfishness, and lifts us up above ourselves, we see Him only very dimly, know Him only afar off.

Saved from that danger, the woman fell into another, from which Christ had to extricate her with delicate care. She was a quick-witted creature; and, seeing her chance, she rushed into religious controversy, and talked round and about the thing, with a kind of joyous abandon. But Christ checked that at once. No, no! He said, let us keep to the point, to your own sinfulness and failure, and how we are to save you from it; would not allow Himself to be led away up any tempting bypath. And that mood of this very human woman

is a perpetual danger for many of us. For we enjoy loitering about the environs of religion, we are interested in the church or in theology, we like to think of them, or talk about them; but we end with that, do nothing really practical. In his day Buddha laid it down that speculation and theologizing is the very first among the snares that trick people into the belief that they are making progress, while the life is being left unlived, the character unchanged. His was an age of immense mental activity, and all the powers of that acutely minded people were not dissipated over a score of interests as ours are to-day, but concentrated on the questions that lie on the borderland of religion and philosophy. There were no less than sixty-eight clamorous sects, each hot upon the propagation of their own particular creed as to the beginning of the world and such-like things, held to be all-important. And Buddha brusquely brushed the whole thing out of court as a mere obscuring of the real issues of life. There were ten subjects called the indeterminates, whether the world is eternal or not, whether one who attains to the full truth has an existence after death or passes out of being, and the like, on which he would give no set opinion, largely on the ground that such questions have nothing to do with our business, with the gaining of a holy life, with religion *per se*. Why bother about impertinent questions, he would answer; you get to your task, which is the same task, whether there be a heaven or no, and whether Nirvana is an existence or is not. "I am come to give a medicine to men": and am not to be drawn aside to chatter about this or that subsidiary thing. Your business is to gain the character that I have set before you; and to lose yourself in theorizing, and neglect the actual working of it out,

is to miss the whole point of the thing. Yet he found men would do it; has a delightfully sarcastic dialogue in which a poor soul shot by a poisoned arrow becomes intensely interested in all kinds of things about that arrow, the wood of which it was made, the kind of bow that shot it, what bird's feathers winged it, even the complexion of the archer, was he dark or fair, anything and everything that touches it, however remotely; keeps talking and thinking round and round about the arrow, and learns everything about it;—but never pulls it out, and dies. You tug it out, cries Buddha, before the poison soaks through your system. After that we can discuss it, but not till then. "No, no!" said Christ, "we are not going to enter on religious controversy. You too have an arrow in your soul; and every second we delay, the poison spreads." And with that He laid His hand on it, and drew it forth. And until He has done that for us, nothing else matters.

It was when our Lord had steered her past all that, that things began to happen! "Come!" she cried excitedly, and no wonder, "see a man who told me all that ever I did: is not this the Christ?" And that is what strikes every one who deals with Him, how intimately He knows these erratic hearts of ours we hardly understand ourselves.

> "He took the suffering human race,
> He read each wound, each weakness clear:
> He struck His finger on the place,
> And said, 'Thou ailest here and here.'"

And we flush at the truth of it. But since His diagnosis is so accurate, is it not likely that He has also prescribed aright? If you will only try Him, if you will take His promises in one hand, and your needs in the other, and ask Him "What in face of these are You

to do for me ! " you too will find that it works out ; and like these joyful Samaritans will soon be saying, " Now we believe, not on any hearsay evidence, but because we ourselves have tried Him, and know that this is the Christ." Like the man born blind, with the cleverest minds in Jerusalem trying to bamboozle him, who remained quite unperturbed, admitting that there were many things he did not understand, but always adding doggedly, " but there is one thing I do know, that whereas I was blind, now I see," you will be lifted clear above the difficulties by which others are assailed, but which will stot off from your mind, like hail off a roof. For you will more and more found on a fifth Gospel, far the most precious of them all to you, that written by your own experience, full of things just as wonderful as anything in Luke or Matthew or any of them all, things that you know, that cannot be explained away, or doubted, or denied. And as you turn the pages, and remember how here He called you, and there He healed you, and here again He wrought some mighty work for you on a dark day, faith will grow very easy, and indeed inevitable. For, after all, the final proof that Jesus really is the Saviour is that all who try Him are convinced that He does save. And as He stands and looks at you, who have made such a mess of it that you have long stopped trying, there is no fear in His eyes, no doubt upon His face. " I can save you," He says.

XVI.

CHRIST AND THE UNTHEOLOGICALLY-MINDED.

"Now the mass of the people listened with delight to Him. And in the course of His teaching He said, Beware of the scribes!"—MARK xii. 38 (MOFFATT).

ONCE as we burrowed to escape a shell storm in the stuffy cellars under Ypres, to pass the time, one who had been a University lecturer started propounding mathematical conundrums, which some solved easily, others more slowly, while some could make nothing of them at all. On which he laughed and said that these last must have been born with unmathematical minds. Later, the talk drifted to religion; and while, as always, there was reverence for Jesus Christ; as always, any fragment of formal theology immediately stumbled them, as if the light had suddenly blown out. Until I also laughed, and said that surely they had been born with untheological minds. To which with unanimity and disconcerting earnestness there came the response, "We have, most people are; and if only the Church would grasp that, and teach in a language in which we can think, it would become so vastly easier for us to see Jesus Christ!" And that is not an odd opinion to be brushed impatiently aside. Some little time ago were we not let into the secret

that about forty years back, when the strange Evolution scare was at its height, Archbishop Tait convened a meeting at Lambeth of the more distinguished men of science of those days who were known to be loyal to the Church, with a view to their issuing such a short statement of their Christian faith as might allay the perturbation in the popular mind: and that, at their very first meeting, they separated finally, because, as the archbishop in his disappointment candidly admitted, "the religious faith of these men, real and deep though it is, will not go into articles and propositions?" And the number of those, learned and unlearned, of whom that is true, who feel the pull on heart and soul, conscience and reverence of the Lord Jesus Christ, and who respond to it and Him in their own way, but whose religious faith, real and deep though it be, "will not go into articles and propositions" is far larger than the theologically-minded have begun to understand. And it is more than time that they did understand it, ceased to claim a monopoly of the guardianship of the gates of Christ's kingdom, where they are apt to pass through only such as have brains that happen to work more or less in their own, that is to say in a theological, fashion; took it in that to be theological is, at most, only a gift, like drawing or a knack for languages, which one has or has not; that those, who do not possess it, can no more think theologically than an unmathematical person can be mathematical; that the moment you begin to arrange Christ's teaching into formal doctrines philosophically stated, that you take the good red clay of religion as it lies there in God's blessed sunshine and clean breezes, clay in which flowers and yellow grain, such beautiful mystical living things, will seed and grow, and cut it accurately into exact rectangles of hard-baked dry

bricks, with which you then proceed to fashion for us what are deemed to be seemly habitations for men's souls and minds, you at once make certain people fidgety and home-sick in that neat monotony of miners' cottages, all set out there, one by one, with such admirable precision, for they choke in their unaired stuffiness, are foolish enough actually to prefer to live among the flowers and waving grasses, and the sunshine, and the disorderly beauties that Christ gave us so lavishly, just as He left them; feel there much more at home, the daft gipsy creatures that they are!—in short must face this disconcerting fact that, while their theological labours have been immeasurably helpful to unnumbered people, to multitudes of others they have made Christianity a foreign religion, to get at which, these last have painfully to acquire a mental language alien to their minds, in which they always speak blunderingly and with a foreigner's accent, are always laboriously translating in the back of their heads, and cannot enjoy the real beauty of the thing because of the difficulty of the medium, as a boy—still stumbled by the irregular verbs, cannot see the wit and deftness and art of Horace, but is simply bored.

And the tragedy is that it is all unnecessary. Look at that laborious student, poring over these crabbed Eastern letters that are hurting his eyes and making his head swim, and all to small effect. He is trying to read Shakespeare translated into Arabic. Will nobody tell the poor soul that Shakespeare is his own countryman, and that you can read him best in English; that he is most Shakespeare in that tongue? And Christ is your Christ, whether you have a theological mind or not. And, as on the Day of Pentecost the Holy Ghost spake to every man "in his own

language" ; and outlanders like Parthians and Medes and dwellers in Mesopotamia, no less than the men of Judea, Arabians as well as Jews, heard clearly and distinctly, and could follow easily in their own native speech, so the man in the street can learn all that he needs to know of Christ in his own mental dialect. Sully, the psychologist, has a story of how a mother reading Bible stories to her child, proposed to miss one out, as being too hard for her to follow ; whereupon the wise little one replied, " I can understand them all perfectly well, if only you would not explain them to me " ! Here too it is not the facts, it is the explanations that have usually been the stumbling-block ; and that even in the Testament.

It was natural for the writer to the Hebrews to think in terms of sacrifice, so current then, but by so doing he has made things really harder for many now, who do not, and cannot, think in the phraseology of a dead sacrificial system which they do not follow, and almost every item of which is variously explained by differing scholars. Yet put it in terms of God's self-sacrifice, and the men and women who gave up their own boys for the world will understand it with a stabbing sense of proud kinship, and with their hearts running out to this wonderful God who loves us as unselfishly as that. Do not even the Evangelists introduce something less than the amazing perfection of their own stupendously heart-gripping accounts of the Crucifixion by their theological muttering in an undertone " that it might be fulfilled " ? The facts, as they give them, so break us down ; the explanations they interpolate seem so paltry. And when men, who are not inspired, take to explaining the gospel, they are apt to weave the weirdest puzzles for succeeding generations, because inevitably what they do is to state Christianity in the

terms of the philosophies and modes of thought current in their own day, but soon as dead as Cleopatra, with the result that their theology is as dead too. Yet sometimes it comes down the centuries, a curious survival, although the philosophies have disappeared, like the buttons on our sleeves that once meant something, but what nobody now remembers. It is the explanations that puzzle. As a character in Tchekov's *The Wife* says : " I listened, and according to my habit applied my usual measures to him, but not a single one of them would fit even approximately : and yet, curiously, while I only looked at him and listened to him, he was as a man, perfectly clear to me, but the moment I began applying my measures to him he became, in spite of all his sincerity and simplicity, an extraordinarily complex, confused, and inexplicable nature." So, " to explain Jesus," says Glover, " His friends and contemporaries spoke of Him as the Logos, the Sacrifice, Christ our Passover, the Messiah, and the like. Of these terms, not one is intelligible without a commentary. To ordinary people Jesus is at once intelligible, far more than the explanations of Him."

What then is to be done ? Here is a mass of folk for whom Christ died, who are not helped but confused by our theologies, which turn out to be much like a stained-glass window—a wonderful thing to many within, but to outsiders a mere smudge and blur of which from their angle they can make nothing, and which actually keeps them, peer how they may, from seeing in almost at all. It will not do for the Church simply to say irritably that their minds ought to work differently. Being what they are, what is to happen now ? There is this fact to start with, that obviously when Christ came, whole numbers of people of this type suddenly dis-

covered, much to their own amazement, how interesting and exciting and vital religion is. Hitherto they had felt that it was not their world, had moved about it awkwardly, and feeling far from home, had allowed the official language to pass over their heads without hoping to make much of it. Yet here was One who spoke about it and they followed Him easily, found it amazingly close to life, felt that this was their business, to which they could and must attend, and that at once. And if to-day they saw Him face to face, He would exercise that same power upon many of them still. But if they are ever so to see Him, both sides surely will need to take action, both the Church and the untheologically-minded.

And first of them. They must make certain, to begin with, that they are not talking nonsense, and that they have fastened their quarrel on the proper thing. For there is no doubt at all that the teaching of Christ is a theology ; and if, as they say, their minds are drawn to Him, then it is not theology that stumbles them, but only certain types of it, unwise in themselves it may be, or at least which do not happen to appeal to them. The message of Christ is many things : a reading of human nature, and this puzzling life of ours, and human destinies, and much else ; but, above all, it is a revelation of God. What Christ felt that this sick world needed more than anything else is to know God as He really is, and He showed Him to us. But that is pure theology ; though happily it is as mercifully different from the formal jargon of the schools as day from night. It is the poet, says Horace, who tells us what is beautiful and base, useful and not, far plainer and more clearly than any philosopher or anybody else. And, blessed be His name, the Lord

Christ was a poet, with a poet's eyes and faculty of seeing things, and making others see them. A little laddie in the crook of His arm, the birds so audaciously unafraid in this great dangerous world, even poor caged things for sale, the red gleam in a lowering sky, the grain yellow and ready for the sickle, a vine tendril tapping on the shutter of the upper room, the sudden wind howling in the alley that night in Jerusalem, the sound of living water, chattering and leaping—round things like these, it was, that He wove His deep unfathomable sayings; and every one can follow, though no one can begin to exhaust. And if you complain that they take that living water out of the sunshine where it sparkles, into their theological laboratories, and show you that it is composed of oxygen and hydrogen and call it H_2O; and if you cry disconsolately, "No doubt, but in that form it is of little use to me! And before they took it, it was so beautiful, and so helped and refreshed and revived me; while this! What can I do with H_2O?" Well, do not follow them into their laboratories. Christ is your Christ as much as theirs! The doctrines are intended as helps. And if they do not help you, then let them alone; and go to Christ on your own feet (that first right of every soul, especially of every Protestant), and think Him out with your own mind, and deal with Him at first hand, and for yourself. You will do it modestly, if you are wise, not railing at those who with toil have raised these keeps, all along the stormy borders, in which in dangerous days many distressed souls found a shelter. For the doctrines were not built up for idle pleasure, nor in a vacuum; they were the reply to subtle and imposing attacks: and even if to you they seem mere dangerous ruins, dark places where you blink and cannot see, the

brave if dim memories that cling round them ought to make you think of them with some kindly emotion. And in the end of the day you may come back nearer to some of them than you would now believe; as Herbert Spencer tells us, in the last pages of his autobiography, his once angered mind had come to think with sympathy of the creed-makers, and to wish that they might some day be successful; and as Bosanquet, who flung away from the faith because of its doctrine of the atonement, felt at last that that was the most profound and central truth in the whole world. But, meantime, attach yourself to Jesus Christ by anything you can. Paul can be bafflingly profound, yet he can be extremely simple. And in one such mood, asking why did Christ die? he answers, that we, touched by that chivalry, might have to be His friends through time and eternity. And you do feel the pull of that; and you do know what friendship means, and that the influence of this wonderful Master playing on you from day to day would lift you up above yourself, shame and inspire you into worthier living. Go to Him then, as the disciples went, attracted, though not understanding much as yet. From you too He will accept that, as a beginning. And as the years slip past, you also will find, what they found, that He keeps looming up before your astonished mind ever greater and more bewildering; the Friend become the Master, and the Master the King, till you too, perhaps, will fall as dead at the feet of One in whom, for all the gracious intimacies there have been between Him and you, you have seen the very heart of God. But, meantime, attach yourself to Him where you can. Dante tells us that he was examined by Peter on faith, and James on hope, and John on love. And, though you might not make much of that

first trying paper on the Trinity in Unity, Paul gives you this assurance to encourage you, that far the most marks are allotted for the third, which you could live out, if you chose.

But the Church, too, must surely take some action. For, as things are, for many we are back at Balzac's Unknown Masterpiece. You remember how the old painter, who had toiled at it so long that he had gone crazy over it, allowed it to be viewed at last, crying excitedly, "Do you not see how the Figure stands out? Does it not seem you could pass your hand along that back? Ah, she breathed! I am sure she breathed!" "Do you see anything?" one asked the other. "No! do you?" "I see nothing!" They went right and left; they came in front, bending down, standing up. "I can see nothing but confused masses of colour, and a dead wall of paint!" "No, look!" In one corner of the canvas they could distinguish a bare foot emerging from the clash of colour and vague shadows that made up a dim and formless fog. This exquisite fragment had escaped the incomprehensible, slow, and gradual destruction. "There *is* a woman beneath!" cried Porbus, calling attention to the coats of paint with which the old artist had overlaid and concealed his work in his quest for perfection. There is a Christ beneath, but many cannot see Him under all these coats of doctrine. It is a shock to be met on Christmas Day, as one is in certain churches, with the *Quicunque vult*, with its metaphysical subtleties, its divisions and its subdivisions, till the glory of the day grows pale, and God drearily far away, the God who in the Gospels this is supposed to be explaining is so near, so real, so lovable. And that is how this whole elaborate business strikes many minds and souls. Leave them to them-

selves and they have little difficulty. That was what startled so many men out at the war, that when they thought of God for themselves in their own way, He grew so obvious and believable and adorable. "The God of the front," said a Canadian sergeant, "is so different from the theological one. He has hands that are roughened and bloodied and burned; His eyes are brave eyes that have known suffering; His is a human heart, and there is the suggestion of a valiant jest in His splendid bearing of defiance. And He is not far off. He is among us, is the man upon our right hand and our left who goes into battle with us. Not through philosophy, but through life, must men come to know God." That is how the untheological mind, when left alone, pictures Him to itself; and is not that vastly nearer the truth than the Incomprehensibles and the hypostases and the Persons, and all the other dreary jargon of formal theology?

Something would be gained if we allowed people think, not in Latin or Middle English, not through the brains of the fourth or the seventeenth century, but in the language of to-day and through their own; really believing that God is alive, and that the most the Holy Ghost can do for us was not exhausted at Nicea or Westminster, but that He still speaks to men and women now; something, too, if a touch of poetry could be introduced into theology which, somehow, dealing though it does with the most beautiful and moving thing in the world, is apt to be almost incredibly prosaic and pedestrian, takes the most delicate and obvious metaphors and, dealing with them as hard material facts, stolidly pushes them back to their extreme logical conclusions ("This is My body," says Christ, breaking a bit of bread: and, out of that, dull and

obtuse minds contrive to weave the monstrosity or unintelligibility of transubstantiation!); and something more if what is doubtful were admitted to be doubtful, and what is subordinate were frankly called subordinate, and the emphasis were laid upon the few essentials. Lord Chesterfield wrote of his neighbour and himself in retirement: "Tyrawley and I have been dead two years, but we do not want it known." There are doctrines of the Church that have been dead much longer than that, though a like spirited attempt is made to hush the matter up. In vain! For the fact is patent to the meanest intelligence, when the wind blows from that quarter. "My mother," says Fontenelle, "was a dear, calm, religious soul; she often told me in her quiet way, 'My son, you will certainly be damned.' But the thought seemed to give her no disquietude!" And do not the apathy and coolness and half-hearted labours of the Church make clear, whatever it may say, that it does not believe in what it thinks that it believes, the doctrine, the tremendous fact it may be, of eternal punishment. And so with other things. But, as a shrewd thinker puts it, a basal trouble is that most Churches limit themselves unnecessarily by addressing their message almost exclusively to those who are open to religious impressions through the intellect, whereas, he says, there are at least four other gateways, "the emotions, the imagination, the æsthetic feeling, and the will, through which they can be reached." "Must I plunge into metaphysics?" cries Gray the poet. "Alas, I cannot see in the dark; nature has not provided me with the optics of a cat." You must, declares theology, and builds up its whole structure on that supposition. But must he after all? "The heart has its reasons,"

as Pascal said, "of which reason knows not." "We know truth, not only by the reason, but by the heart; and it is by this that we know first principles. It is the heart that is sensible of God, not the reason. This then is faith, God sensible to the heart, not to the reason." If one can give that, must one give more? It is not true to say that a full rounded formal theology is necessary for efficiency in living out Christ. Wesley, for his part, just denied that: and in the early days of the Church when it was winning the world, the creed demanded of the average man was not the full-grown Pauline system. "Paul," says Gwatkin, "figures more largely in the New Testament than in New Testament times: it is a mistake always, and in the case of the disciples it is specially disastrous, to measure average men by the great leaders of thought." Some simple statement like Jesus is Lord, that was enough. It is in fact quite startling to observe how almost no stress was laid upon what we now count the central Christian facts and the essential Christian doctrines. Yet these men also saw something in Christ that drew them, mastered them, compelled them to give up their all for Him. They risked for Him, dared for Him, lived for Him, lost for Him, died for Him, blithely and glad-heartedly, for something in Him that won them; something, just what they themselves could not tell, it was just Christ. That is all they could say, in their dumb, untheological way, which none the less worked out and won the world. "It is a natural assumption," says Rainy, "that the post-apostolic Church started with the fulness of apostolic teaching. And it is often made without a thought. But it is entirely opposed to facts. Elementariness is the signature of all the early literature. It is not for that

less Christian. Great elements of apostolic teaching have become hardly audible, and much that did float round Christian minds had not revealed its significance: its meaning is faintly caught: the thought it awakes is indefinite. Christ saves: but how He saves is not well explained. But it was felt and believed. A great deal of New Testament teaching about this was not appropriated at all, or in the vaguest way, but the thing was sure." That is to say, that these first zealous heroes of the faith thought of Christ untheologically: and to-day there are multitudes with passion and enthusiasm and devotion to offer, if we would take them upon these same terms. And why should we not? No doubt we can agree with Anselm, "It is surely a failure in reasonable conduct that one who has been established in faith should not seek to understand what he believes"; even with Sir Henry Jones, "Let a man seek God by way of pure reason and he will find Him," as true at least of certain minds. It was Christ Himself who asked, "Whom do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?" And theology has been men's varying and stumbling answers to His own question to them. Are we not told to serve the Lord our God with all our mind, no less than with our other faculties? And yet there is this unpleasant fact that, as the Abana river, which begins by roaring white and foam-flecked through its rocky gorges, never gains the sea, but dies out, a mere spongy marsh among the desert dunes, so every single one of the greater spiritual movements of the world which, breaking the banks of formalism and custom and convention, have swept through the earth, whirling ancient and deep-rooted evils utterly away, while all along their margins on the instant and as if by magic there sprang up wide ribbons

of living greeneries, where there had been only a dead dreariness of desolation, every single one of them, in spite of that first rush, has been silted up by the sands of a dry and metaphysical concern for non-essentials, not of religion but theology: that as the jungle breaks in with incredible rapidity, so that where yesterday there was rich and cultivated land, there is to-day only the tangled wildness, so every religion has been choked to death or to decrepitude by its own too-luxuriant theology. Always the new faith changed from a life to a doctrine, was debased from a passion to a theory, abstract, metaphysical, doctrinaire. Always at first it was a power that men seized and used, and it revolutionized their moral and spiritual world; but always by and by people began to wonder, and to question, to ask what were the how and the why; became so absorbed in the theory of it, and the explanation, in peering at and examining the machinery, that they never noticed they had stopped the wheels, and that nothing was happening any longer! Semi-civilized people are far finer colourists than we, with all our learning. "It is their glorious ignorance of all the rules that does it," Ruskin says, "the pure and true instincts have play and do their work"; but begin teaching them about rules, and these vanish, "generally for ever." So here! In any case, all real lovers of flowers hate botanists with their horrible tin vasculum and their spud, creatures with not a touch of reverence for flowers as such, no eye for beauty, mere gabblers about genus and species, who poke and tear up and destroy. "You see," they tell you glibly, plucking at some ethereal thing that had brought the Lord God Himself very near, "it is all quite simple." "Here," they say, tugging at the gracious thing, "are the petals,

and there is the stem, and here the stamens, and here the calyx, and here the sepals, and here the corolla, and, yes, that is all." It is so very far from all! That withering little heap is not my flower! The grace, the poise, the witchery, the something, is utterly gone; and the fool does not see it, sticks its fellow into his hideous box, proud of another gap filled in his dried collection! So, when formal theology is finished with its doctrines and its dogmas and its systems, it may be all true and very learned, only that is not what won me to the Master; the witchery, the something is away, has clean escaped you. And that summary of yours has no more resemblance to the faith I hold than the bones and skeleton of a dead man have to the face his children loved, and the kindly hands that once caressed them. After the death of that dull person, Mr. Wortley, all his wife's love letters were found, each endorsed on the outside with the date and a synopsis of the contents! What these intolerable synopses are to all the wealth of love within, surely the doctrines are to the real gospel. For religion is a falling in love; and as Jalalu 'D Din Rumi puts it, "However much we describe and explain love, when we fall in love we are ashamed of our words. Explanation by the tongue makes most things clear: but love unexplained is clearer." "In theology," said Jowett of Balliol, "the less we define the better. A true instinct prevents our entangling the faith of Christ with the philosophy of the day, the philosophy of past ages is a still more imperfect exponent of it." And A. B. Davidson, "Our reasoned thoughts of God are mostly sure to be false: a few great reverential thoughts or rather feelings about Him is our truest knowledge—let every thought be a feeling."

Must we not get back at last to the position of Erasmus, that simply to exchange one set of doctrines for another is at best merely to cut away dead branches, and not to sink down to the root of things; which is, he says, to cease to be so theological at all, from what he calls "blasphemous debating on subjects beyond human comprehension"; that definitions ought to be as few as possible, and opinion left free upon many subjects. "Our present problems are said to be waiting for the next Œcumenical Council; better let them wait till the veil is removed, and we see God face to face." Meantime, he urges, let us not waste energies on futile bickering with which we might reform the world, and carry our Lord to the heathen. It is an altogether new kind of creed we need, thought Denney, not metaphysical, not philosophical, but couched "in the simple language of religion," and setting down one's attitude to Christ; a thing that can be sung rather than tamely recited. And in drawing it up let us remember, that on the lectern of practically every Buddhist temple in Japan there lies the Lotus Scripture, which, declaring that Kwanyin is always being reincarnated for somebody's salvation, adds this: "If it is necessary that doctors of theology should be saved, Kwanyin appears as a doctor of theology; but if it is necessary to save young men, Kwanyin appears as a young man." After all, it was as a young man that Jesus lived and taught and died: aye, and young men who rallied to Him, as they would do still, if they could see Him. Huien Tsiang tells us that there was a cave, upon the walls of which the image of the Buddha would appear to devout worshippers. But when he reached the district, eager to witness this, the very memory of the place was blotted from men's

minds, the country jungle overgrown, and no one knew the path ; until he found one little lad who had once chanced upon it, who undertook to lead him there. Every one cried out at a scheme so mad, for the undergrowth was rank and thick and tiger-haunted. But he, not to be deterred, held on ; and, led by that little lad, fought his way through at last, and reached the cave. Five times he prostrated himself and saw nothing at all. But at the sixth, when all but desperate, a light shone forth ; and there, clear, distinct, and ah, how beautiful ! the very Buddha of his heart's desire. Five of us, so he tells us, saw him plainly, but the sixth saw nothing. So, many to-day long to see Christ, but the jungle of theology hides Him and cuts them off from the sacred place, and few have daring or the hard-breathing patience to hack their slow way through. But if the matted undergrowth were down, or a path cleared through it, some might not see Him even then, but to how many He would grow quite clear and plain, and actual and there ! And to-day, as always, it is the child heart that remembers the lost way to Christ. " It seems to me," said Rainy once in the Assembly, " that one of the great mistakes of some of our German friends in their theology is that they seem to imagine they can construe God. You cannot construe Him, you can only look up toward Him."

XVII.

THE REAL OBSTACLE.

"Do you want your health restored?"—JOHN v. 7 (MOFFATT).
"Do you wish to have health and strength?" (WEYMOUTH).

MR. KIPLING lays it down with confident assurance that if any one has not got from life what he wished from it, that is clear proof either that he did not really want it, or that he tried to bargain about the cost.

That is, of course, the easy dictum of a successful man whose dreams have happened to come true, who has been given, or has found, his chance. But as a reading of this confusing life of ours it is much too simple to be universal. Whitman, looking out over a world so full of broken dreams and faded hopes, and valour thrown away and wasted, breaks forth in his gallant way:

"With music strong I come, with my cornets and my drums,
I play not marches for accepted victors only, I play marches for conquer'd and slain persons.
Have you heard that it was good to gain the day?
I also say it is good to fall; battles are lost in the same spirit in which they are won.
I beat and pound for the dead,
I blow through my embouchures my loudest and gayest for them.
Vivas to those who have fail'd!
And to those whose war-vessels sank in the sea!
And to those themselves who sank in the sea!
And to all generals that lost engagements, and all overcome heroes!
And the numberless unknown heroes equal to the greatest heroes known."

And our hearts respond to the chivalry of that, feel that it is only fair. For some of us have seen the long line spring out of the trenches, and face and do more than seemed possible for shrinking flesh and sensitive hearts like ours. And in a little while a thin trickle of survivors staggered back. What more could the boys have done or given? Yet the enemy's position was untaken; it was all in vain. It may be very well for Thackeray to growl that he hates a story with a sad ending, and will never read another; and for Darwin to maintain that against such "a law ought to be passed." But real life does not always give the glory and the triumph and the prizes to the hero, however much he wants them, and however lavishly he pays.

And yet Kipling's law is much nearer to the facts of things than some of us like to imagine who are wont to explain our own insignificance, with some ill-humour and a sense of grievance, on the ground that we have never had a chance, and that the dice have somehow always been loaded heavily against us. In the vast majority of cases there is not likely to be much in such self-pitying whimpering. Given the right stuff in oneself, the very things that crush others act like spurs or wings. "Our Lord's first humiliation on earth was His being born, and that in a low condition," said Whyte of St. George's (who himself by sheer audacity of daring had fought his own way out of an utter poverty that seemed to give him never a chance), and added, that all His followers do not share in that, "it is only some specially chosen men who have that eminent opportunity ordained and offered to them." "That eminent opportunity!" That is how he looked back on the pinching and the starving and the facing unafraid of sheer impossibilities till somehow they got done, with a heart

awed and humbled and almost afraid because God had given him so huge a start. Sit down and snivel about your untoward circumstances, and you will end where you began, preaching a sour discontent, or wasting the time, with which you might have done everything, in complaining to yourself and others that you never had a chance of doing anything. Big-heartedly face difficulties, and, before such intrepid spirits, doors keep opening of themselves where quite certainly there were no doors, no, not the smallest chink in the dead and imprisoning walls; by such audacious feet, that dare to climb where there seems never a foothold, the most impossible barriers get scaled. "Men at some time are masters of their fates. The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars, but in ourselves that we are underlings." If we find ourselves in the ruck of folk, the probability is, not that life has insulted us by offering what is quite unworthy of us, but either that we are very ordinary people who have got as far as we deserve; or that, whatever our gifts be, we lack the grit, the adaptability, the grim determination, the long patience needed for a real success; that our ambition is a vague desire that has never solidified into a purposeful whole-heartedness; that, faced by the market price of what we want, we discover that after all we do not want it as much as we thought, are quite clear at least that we are not prepared to pay down this for it. And yet it cannot be had cheaper, except in the rarest cases.

I suppose that that is so in every sphere, that the mass of serviceable work, and even genius, that is lost to the world through the lack of some courage and endurance is sheer tragedy. Certainly it is beyond all question in things spiritual, and we had better face the facts. Here are you and I and numbers of others

with some desire to grow efficient in these matters. It vexes and annoys us when our temper blazes up, we are unhappy and ashamed when our tongue lures us into saying something we think smart, and remember only too late that it is also unkind. There are dozens of things in ourselves which we see clearly just will not do, and must be radically altered. That is, indeed, why we are Christians. For we have heard that Jesus Christ can amend these flaws for us; and we never dream of doubting it; cannot, in view of facts within our own experience. And yet not much seems to be happening in our own case—nothing impressive or vivid or dramatic. Christ or no Christ, we seem to dodder along, year in, year out, more or less our old, obstinate, shambling selves. And this in spite of the really tremendous promises of the New Testament, of its confident assertions, given over and over and over again, that if any one will really take and really use this new power, offered with eagerness to all and sundry, nothing, however splendid, is impossible for any one; and the best is far the likeliest even for the poorest bungler of us all. Think of the staggering hopes held out before us, not as hopes but certainties, not to a few picked souls expert in this high region, but to every one—that we can grow so blameless, that even God's eyes searching us will see no fault, nothing that He could wish away; that we can become perfectly equipped to meet, at once and adequately, every call of His holy will upon us; that here and now we can stand unshaken on the very scenes of our continual overthrow; can be lifted clean beyond the range of the shelling that has so harassed and devastated us, tumbling our character in confused ruins; can be made new creatures with quite new desires and appetites

and likings and powers. Lay our actual drab experience from day to day beside the sheen and glistening of such words, and surely it grows clear that they have had a very limited fulfilment, so far, in our case. For nineteen centuries this power of God has been present in the world. And even yet how many are herded into hovels where the decencies of family life can hardly be conserved; live in conditions where, if the soul were not immeasurably hardy, it would be choked out. Surely this thing is greatly less efficient than it claims to be, ought to be, might be. And we ourselves trail along after Christ, so spiritually shabby, so morally down at the heel, doing our best to make His promises look ridiculous, to have the whole thing laughed out of court. There is little in us to make people turn and look wistfully after us, with a sudden envy awake in their hearts, and asking what have these fortunate folk found that makes them so much cleaner and happier and more unselfish in their use of life than others are? Why is it that it is not working out in us as we have the right to expect with the New Testament before us?

Over and over again the Book itself foresees our difficulty, and keeps asking us, almost in Kipling's words, whether we really want and are prepared to take the things it has to offer; and whether we are ready to face and meet the inevitable price. Our Lord Himself had a strange way of bluntly questioning the most unlikely people about that. In the porches of Bethesda, for example, He once came on a poor soul who had had a bleak and wintry life of it. Will you accept your health, He asked, will you take it if I offer it to you? That sounds cruel. Yet it was not cruel. There was an eagerness upon Christ's face, an odd thrill in His voice. Here at last, He felt, was one for whom He

could do something. For have you ever thought out why in all that sorry little crowd of miserable, broken things He healed no more than one? Apparently the rest had grown dulled, listless, apathetic, half content. After all, they were spared the heat and dust and toil of others; and, once you got accustomed to it, it was no bad life to lie there in the cool of the shadows, watching the shimmering of the water, and with the pleasant sound of an occasional copper tinkling into one's can. But here at last was one with his face all a lean wistfulness, and his heart an obstinate ache for what still never came. And our Lord's eyes grew bright. Will you accept it?—and it was He who was the more eager of the two—here, take it; and already He was heaping it upon him with both busy hands.

So it was constantly. Always He kept asking, Do you want it, will you have it, will you take it? And as a rule they answered frankly, No; took His proffered gifts into their hands, and turned them round and round, looking at them queerly, and gave them back as of no manner of use to them. I can make you like Myself, He used to say, will teach you how to use your life as I spend Mine. But, bless me, they made answer, we have no desire for that. For many of them thought Him a bad man, far better hustled out of the way. And those who did see the glory of His character felt that, of course, it was not for them, begrimed and hot and dusty. Beautiful, certainly, but quite unpractical! Such extreme views would never do in actual life. Unselfishness is all very well, but carried to such lengths as this is just impossible, would land one in a dozen awkwardnesses every day in business, would make one's family life one long uncomfortableness. And so they also pushed away His gifts. "But," said the accuser,

so Xenophon tells us, "Critias and Alcibiades, after having been associates of Socrates, inflicted a great number of evils on the state." "For whatever evil they did the state I shall make no apology; but as to their intimacy with Socrates I will state how it took place. Will any one say that they sought his society from a desire to lead such a life as Socrates led, and to practise such temperance as he practised? I myself, indeed, am of opinion, that if a god had given them their choice, whether they would live as they saw Socrates living, or die, they would have chosen rather to die."

And to-day Christ asks us that same question. Things are not moving as you wished and hoped. But do you really want it, would you take it were it offered to you, here and now? Garibaldi once, as everybody knows, issued a stirring appeal to his countrymen. Come, he cried, for I have such gifts to give you—long marches, nights on the hard ground, wounds, even death, perhaps, for Italy. That is fine. But it takes some bigness of soul to respond to it. And when Christ comes and promises that He will teach us how to put our life to lofty uses, not squandering it tamely on our own mean little dreams, but throwing it away for God and for our fellows, lifting the world a little nearer Him, making the earth for some a brighter place because we have passed through, do we gaze at Him blankly, and ask with blunt directness, "But where do I come in, and what about me?" Is our ideal of life something soft and cosy and comfortable, the pushing of our own interests, the furthering of our own plans? There are those who, if they found themselves in heaven, would think the place so dull and boring and indeed intolerable that, battering on the gates, they would with urgency

keep clamouring "Let me out, let me out!" And there are many minds for whom our Lord's proposals are entirely unattractive. We want our circumstances changed, and our incomes increased, and our hours shortened. But when Christ comes and offers to change us, to take away our graspingness and greediness and make us like Himself, that has no manner of appeal to us. No, no, the world is to be altered to suit our convenience, but we are to be what we are. You wonder why you are not making better progress. But, says the Testament, be honest and face facts. Do you really want it? Will you take it? Would you have it, if you could? Spenser tells us that when they liberated the poor slaves that Circe had transformed from human stateliness into mere beasts, some of them were, ah! how grateful; but some were annoyed, missed their old sensual nature, and would not be satisfied without it. "Let Gryll be Gryll, and have his hoggish mind," they said in the end. And the poor fool, made swine again, ran grunting and squealing greedily to the pleasures of the mud and trough he had so sorely missed, content at last. And that is the real sorry reason why far more does not result in us, because when the pinch comes we do not wish what we could have, will not bestir ourselves, are sottishly content.

Or, at least do we want it enough to pay the full price for it down, and not haggle, as Kipling says, about the cost? It will be heavy, so our Lord keeps warning us over and over, with that winning honesty of His. It will be very heavy. No doubt the gospel is quite free, as free as the Victoria Cross, which any one can have who is prepared to face the risks; but it means time, and pains, and concentrating all one's energies upon a mighty project. You will not stroll into Christlikeness with your hands in your pockets,

shoving the door open with a careless shoulder. This is no hobby for one's leisure moments, taken up at intervals when we have nothing much to do, and put down and forgotten when our life grows full and interesting. "You will not yawn yourself into heaven with an idle wish," said Richard Cecil; no, nor, as Samuel Rutherford expressed it, "will you be carried there lying at ease upon a feather-bed." It takes all one's strength, and all one's heart, and all one's mind, and all one's soul, given freely and recklessly and without restraint. This is a business for adventurous spirits; others would shrink out of it. And so Christ had a way of pulling up would-be recruits with sobering and disconcerting questions, of meeting applicants, breathless and panting in their eagerness, by asking them if they really thought they had the grit, the stamina, the gallantry, required. For many, He explained, begin, but quickly become cowed, and slink away, leaving a thing unfinished as a pathetic monument of their own lack of courage and of staying power.

Are you prepared to pay the price, He asks? Well, are we? Do we want Christlikeness, and do we mean to have it, cost us what it may; want it with something of the passion of that epic of the Scottish quest for education? It is a great story that of the roads, never grass grown, that have run all these centuries from the loneliest glens and the most unlikely places to our schools and universities; of the pinching and the scraping together and the long cheerful self-denial in many a cottage home, till at last it had come, and yet another boy lay unable to sleep, with eyes wide open, staring out into the wonderful to-morrow when he too would start out, his meagre bundle of possessions bobbing on his back, would wave farewell from the

top of the brae, be really over it and in the great world ; of the lads, aye and the girls too these days, starving in many a bare garret in the cities, doggedly fighting their way through to that on which their hearts are fixed. Of those who started at the university with me four were dead, as the result of sheer privation, before the seven years slipped past. Or take Whyte of St. George's, lodging with another in a little room with a bed that could hold only one of them, so that they took it turn about to sit and work, six hours a shift, all through the night, paying 3s. 6d. per week for their garret and their food—evidently meagre fare enough—and yet spending on occasion for a book £3, 12s., gathered from who knows where, and by what desperate self-denials. Or, listen to Barrie on his youth : "The greatest glory that has ever come to me was to be swallowed up in London, not knowing a soul, with no means of subsistence, and the fun of working till the stars went out." What can you do with men like that ? You cannot deny them, you cannot hold them back. If they want it, want it as much as that, and are prepared to lay down the full price, then they must have it, that's all. But do we want Christlikeness after that greedy, venturesome, heroic fashion, with such stern and set and one-idead zeal ? Are we dogged and dour and stubborn over it, determined that, cost what it may, we mean to have it ? Then how can it be kept from us ? But are we ? Tchekov tells how he for one had a long and exhausting struggle of it, started a very ordinary boy, but set himself with obstinacy to make a man out of that soft slush of a nature, and those unpromising circumstances ; as he puts it grimly, "to squeeze the slave out of himself drop by drop." And that persistent slave returned so often and dishearten-

ingly, showed through so plainly time on time, do what he could. Yet he stood to his purpose, and would not accept defeat, and at long last a day did come, "a beautiful morning when he felt that he had no longer a slave's blood in his veins, but a real man's." It is a grim, desperate business, declares Christ. Do you think you have the heart for it, dare you throw down the whole price it must cost? Do you simply refuse to acquiesce in what you are, to surrender to yourself, to accept this as your portion? Beaten, do you leap up again with a fierce cold anger in your heart that will take endless punishment, but never yield? Foiled once more, do you, like Browning, find only "assurance in defeat that victory is somehow else to gain," and set about it there and then? There is a Chinese Buddhist of the long ago who shakes his fist in the face of his passions, telling them that they will never master him; that though he fall a million times he will spring up a million and one times; that though it may take untold lives to reach it, holiness he means to have, aye and is going to have it. What can be done with such a truculent, untamable soul except give him what he demands so hotly and insistently? Do you want it like that? Or is ours a very cool and moderate desire that is not ready to pay hardly anything, though we might take it if it fell into our laps? It is so easy to deceive ourselves into imagining we are doing what in point of fact we are only vaguely intending to do: in Mrs. Browning's vivid phrase, "to walk upon the shadow of hills, across a level thrown, and pant like climbers," though really there is never a rise in our flat life.

There was a Carpenter once in the back streets of Nazareth who wished to save the world—this huge,

round, crowded world—He all alone. Are you prepared to pay the price, God asked, with admiration in His eyes, to leave all that you have, home and friends and dear ones? And He said, I am. Some months went by. And are you still ready to meet the cost of it, asked God, to watch the crowds deserting you, and empty spaces growing wider round you, and the very knots at the street corners dwindling, to face censure and ridicule and shame? And without hesitation He replied, I am. A year or two, and the ugly shadow of a cross fell full across His path. Will you go on, asked God, His whole Being glorying in the valour of it? And He still said, I will. And by and by they nailed Him down, and left Him there to die, with nothing done, without one heart that really understood, His whole plans fallen into utter ruin, His dreams become ridiculous. Dare you pay the full price for it, asked God? And Christ replied, I do. And it is only because He did not falter, did not hang back at the last, did not argue that He had gone far enough and nothing had come of it, that it was evidently hopeless; but laid down the uttermost that it could cost, that you and I are not still in our sins, and that the world is being saved, and that God's love has found its chance at last. That is to want. That is what the thing means. Had we a passion after Christlikeness like that, that reckons up no sacrifice, that counts no cost excessive, then we too would have our way, and reach our goal. But we are looking for a bargain counter—so to speak—where we can get it cheap. And there is none. If you want it, really want it, declares Kipling, and if you are prepared to meet the cost, then it is yours. And Christ assures us that is absolutely and inevitably so in spiritual things. Such violent souls, He says, take the Kingdom by storm,

will not be kept out. They batter their way in, pay no heed to refusals, will not admit defeat, have to be satisfied. You and I are not making progress as we ought; and our experience is but a dim and wan reflection of the glory of the promises, and sometimes we feel querulous towards Christ, peevishly discontented, half inclined to think that surely, if He cared, He could do vastly more for us than this. But do we really want it? And, when we reckon up the price, are we still set upon this thing? Do you remember how in Bunyan "the man with the stout countenance," looking at what it means, and weighing all the difficulties of the spiritual life, went boldly to him with the book and pen and inkhorn, and, "Set down my name, sir," he demanded. "For I have looked this whole thing in the face; and, cost me what it may, mean to have Christlikeness; and will." If we could look across the shoulder of the writer, whose name is it he is setting down: what new recruit is valiantly flinging in all that he has and is into the great adventure? Is it yours? Have you made up your mind, and set your teeth? Is your one answer to the long and trying story of the difficulties to be faced, the sacrifices to be made, the steady valour it requires– all that I know, have reckoned up, and am prepared to meet. But this I mean to have, cost what it may! Dare you? Will you? Do you?

XVIII.

GOD'S ROADMAKERS.

"We hoped that it was He."—Luke xxiv. 21.

SOMETIMES upon the street a snatch of conversation comes to us from a passer-by, quite curiously illuminating. It was only a chance remark without a context that we heard. Yet we feel that we know a great deal about the person who said that: the kind of man that he must be seems fairly fixed; and we turn and look after him with interest or amusement, as the case may be. So, though it is two thousand years now since this downcast couple set out for Jerusalem, and the winds blow little of their conversation down the centuries to us, this single phrase that comes audibly to our ears is enough of itself to set them vividly before the mind. "We had hoped that this was He," that reaches us clearly, and they are gone. But hearing it we turn, and after them too look with interest.

For that means, does it not, that they were the kind of folk by whom God gets things done, through whom the world moves forward; who live in a *qui vive* of expectancy, always standing on tiptoe, always sure that something big may happen at any time. Hush! is not this it coming now? With people like that God can do anything; but you and I keep thwarting Him by sheer dulness of spirit. We are listless, apathetic, blasé,

bored; our hopes are small and thin; there is no audacity in our expectation; we take things as they are, and assume that, more or less, this is what they must be to the end; are rather worried by the good fussy souls, so we call them, who keep running themselves somewhat ridiculously out of breath in hot pursuit of what are manifest impossibilities; for so we describe their eager activities. "My dear fellow," we say soothingly, "no doubt at all yours is a beautiful dream, only you must remember you are dreaming, and by and by will waken up to find rain just as wetting, and slush just as horrid as they ever were!" We are a little irritated by youth and its gawky enthusiasms; speak loftily to it, as if experience brought disillusionment; as if God's promises were the merest myths, pretty tales for the nursery, but, of course, out in real life such things do not happen, and to hope to come on them were to be very young and very silly. Life is not the Bible, and God does not break in nowadays, and miracles do not happen; but things just jog on. Stevenson tells us with some heat that a besetting sin of middle age is its maddening habit of waggling its head, and saying superciliously, "*I* too in my time once came through all that," as if generous enthusiasm were a kind of childish ailment that grown-up people leave behind; oblivious of the fact that youth on its side is regarding it with horror, with the dreadful thought taking shape in its brain. "And I too some day may be a thing like that, so dull, so uninteresting, so unheroic, so broken, so thoroughly tamed. Well, thank God, such disaster has not befallen me yet, for I do have some faith and hope and ardour and belief in man and life and God and all the illimitable possibilities of this amazing world"; and with that they fling away

from us in our stupidity with their faces aglow, and their ears listening, like Beethoven, who, when the mood of inspiration was upon him, went out into the country with a piece of music paper in his hand, and kept looking this way and that, watching eagerly for what he knew that God was going to send him, what he felt was coming now. Always they have the happy feeling that it is extremely likely that, at any turning of the commonest, meanest, dustiest road, all full of flying papers, they may come on God; that in the same world with Him anything may happen, and the best seems likeliest; keep asking "Is this He?" very sure that He is going to break in to us in our time, and perhaps it may be now.

That is the mood that gives God His opportunity, that enables Him to work with power. And yet it is not easy to maintain it. A little history is daunting to enthusiasm, or at least makes one wary. Froude, rising up from a prolonged study of this queer chessboard of a world, with the pieces black and white set out so intricately, gave it as his considered verdict that "good will never conquer evil, they are too equally matched." And, indeed, there is much to blow out hope, or at least to make it flicker gustily. So many stars have flamed up, and died out again; so many generous proposals come to nothing; always the people keep eagerly surging to and fro, running excitedly after something new that is at length to do it; and always claiming with assurance that this is He, and that there can be no mistake about it this time. Some two and a half thousand years ago Pasenadi had his land invaded by an enemy who wrought much damage, till at long last he was captured. I will not kill him, so the king decided, I will claim a huge indemnity, and take steps that will

make it impossible for him to raise another army, and I will send him home. At the time, he was thought to be stretching clemency to the cracking-point; but Buddha, when he heard about it, shook his head. This will be the source of new wars, he declared: for always the man who has to pay wishes to get back what he has paid; and always an enemy, held down by force, seeks to conquer his conqueror. Some one must break the vicious circle somewhere, or round and round the wheel will go, and war succeed to war. Those who are preaching that high doctrine to us now must not imagine they have made a huge moral discovery; it was all stated definitely two thousand five hundred years ago! There you are, people say despondently, the thing is obviously unworkable, it has been spoken about so long and nothing has come of it yet. And so they accept things as they are, and hope for nothing better. And truly it is disconcerting to find the men of primitive times so very like ourselves, and living in a world that is as familiar to us as is our own street, faced by our very problems, worried by our difficulties, hopefully trying the schemes which daring spirits are attempting to press on us now as something new and drastic that is certain to succeed; to read in Thucydides of people sick of war, and forming leagues to stop it, and binding themselves by the most solemn of oaths never again to begin hostilities, but always to submit disputes to arbitration, and to stand by adverse decisions, and—forgetting all about it when their national pride was touched; to hear a Chinese emperor long before Christ making an impassioned temperance speech, beseeching his people not to throw away their honour, but to submit themselves to war-time prohibition; to come, in the oldest book in the world that has survived, written

some six thousand years ago in Egypt, upon this, that surely one has heard before, "Be kind to servants; yet in truth that is not easy; for they take all that you give them, and the next day say, 'We go.'" Quite so, snorts your man of common sense, that is what I say, dreams are all very pretty, but we are dealing with real life. There is a heap of human nature in us all; and human nature then is human nature still; tug, how you may, you are not going to lift yourself up by your waistband. "It was an Irish saint," says Carlyle, "who swam the Channel, holding his head in his teeth; and the feat has never been repeated." And so we settle down as if the thing were finally disposed of, and this about us now the best possible, on to the end of time. But take the Scriptures in your hand, and you will find that the prophets had just one gift, an obstinate faculty of seeing impossible visions that had been proved absurd, and which every one else had long ago laughed out of court. The thing, these others said with truth, has been tried repeatedly, and every time in vain. Why bother any further with what evidently cannot be, crashing one's silly head against stone walls? Your hope is out, black, cold! But they would not believe it, knelt and felt the embers. No, they urged, it is not quite out, these are still warm; and spent themselves to coax back a little glow, sure it would come. They did not blink that here and there and yonder they had been disappointed; but they were neither cowed nor beaten. There we failed; well, we must try again: that ended in fiasco, but this time we may light upon a better way that will usher it in. God is surely coming, cries Isaiah; and then, his eyes aglow at the honour of it, adds, but you and I are His roadmakers; our hands, it is, that must prepare His way for Him,

and make straight paths for His feet! We can do that in many ways. The Road of the Loving Hearts, Stevenson called the track that the natives with toil and labour cut for him; and one sure method of letting God burst in on us is to have hearts that love Him, and are grateful for all that He has already done. But nothing so opens the door for Him as a spirit of expectancy, that looks out into the blackest night, and listens confidently for His footsteps. The prophets, said A. B. Davidson, who knew them as few ever did, were terribly "one-ideaed people"; and that idea was that "always God is going to do something." They had many disappointments; that day of the Lord, for which they watched, proved curiously elusive, and delayed in the most unexpected fashion. If we can manage this invasion it will come, Isaiah thought, and yet it did not, not in its fulness: if this Babylonian tangle could be straightened, Jeremiah said, that would bring it in; yet later generations would not accept that it came then; it is here now, is at the very door, shouts Zephaniah; but those after him kept looking forward and not back, to something still to be. "My eyes are growing blind," a psalmist confesses, watching for God: yet, he adds doggedly, "God will come." It is such daring spirits that prepare the way for God.

But He never had a roadmaker like Jesus Christ: for never was there a mind so sure of Him, that so believed in Him, that so counted upon His promises and power, and so risked His whole weight upon them, that looked out upon life so hopefully and saw God plainly where to others there were only empty air and blankness and a vacancy. One of the leading features of Christ's character was its expectancy. To Him nothing was too good to come true; and His was an enthusiastic

mind that always heard it drawing near where, to others, there was not a sound. He knew the difficulties. "When the Son of Man cometh, will He find faith on the earth?" Can it survive so much that tends to stamp it out? Yet His were eyes, as Browning says, that saw a star wherever they looked; and the amazing thing is that, though others peering up, saw nothing, they were actually there. He really believed that He, one Man, could save the world, because He really believed in God. His miraculous gifts, so the Evangelists are careful to explain, were not queer abnormalities; they were faith carried to the highest power, faith to the n^{th}. Luke, seeking the secret of His triumph, reveals the fact that every crisis of His life found Jesus in the attitude of prayer. At the grave of Lazarus, surrounded by that ring of watchful hostile faces, with the dead man still dead, and the miracle still to be performed, He lifted up His heart in thanksgiving, counted the thing as good as done already, because He had asked God about it; and God, He knew, never fails; was as sure of Him as that—dared on the strength of it so intrepidly. When a blundering soul stumbled into some approximation of faith, dim and vague enough as yet, Christ's heart cried out exultantly, "This settles it: if you can give Me that, then I am sure that I can build a wideworld church, and that all hell can never pull it down!" When the Seventy returned from their first mission, all agog with pleasant excitement at its success, though indeed it was a very tiny dent they had made in the mass of evil in the world, none of them was so happy as Christ. Yes, He cried, while you were working, I was watching Satan tumbling headlong out of heaven, swift and obvious as a flash of lightning. When that groping cry reached Him from the other cross,

Christ's spirit rose above the darkness; and He died, there all alone, with not one soul that really understood Him, with the shout of a conqueror, "It is finished," all is done! We still travel the Roman roads, and wonder at their workmanship; but far the safest and the straightest way to God was laid two thousand years ago by Jesus Christ; and, though innumerable multitudes keep passing up and down it every hour of every day, its bottom is as sound as ever; for indeed this new and living way that He has consecrated for us in behind the Veil will last to all eternity. And He made it through His happy expectancy.

These two belonged to that great-hearted clan of intrepid believers. Most people in their day had little hope of a Messiah, or, at least, had tarnished notions of what He would be. It was not a religious age, men's minds were dusty and earthbound. When Christ came, at every street corner they were asking, "Is this He?" But when, urge Him how they might, He refused to take political action or do anything really telling, they were done with Him. The authorities and the theologians openly scoffed at the very notion of Him being the Messiah! To their mind the thing was patently preposterous. Even His own folk concluded that He had gone off His head; set out to hide the family cross and sorrow safely out of sight. But these two, in the general incredulity, refused to be persuaded. It is He! they kept saying doggedly; and, when confronted by damaging-looking scriptures, stammered, but held to it, It is He! I suppose that they were at Emmaus on the Friday too; or, when that shout arose for Barabbas, in the grim silence that followed, two voices would have cried out desperately, No, no! don't throw away the hope that has been nursed for centuries, now that

it has really come. It is He! That is the kind of folk that we need this dark weather, who are sure that God is still alive, and expect His promises to come true; who are not worried and perturbed by the unrest, feeling that it is like that pool at Bethesda, that if the waters are moving, that means that something is going to be healed; remember that "it darkens e'er the dawning more than in all the night," and (look yonder! is it not growing grey?), live, not excited, and not fidgety, and not strained, but in a pleasant thrill of expectancy. For anything may happen, any hour.

But they were wrong, you say. Certainly they did speak in the past tense; wistfully, sadly, broken-heartedly. We were so sure the centuries of waiting were over, that this was really He at last; and we, like all the rest, were fooled; our hero, too, was only an impostor, either a deceiver or else self-deceived, poor soul. What struck Christ was their sadness. That surely in itself was a sign of bigness. It was because the visions they had seen were so splendid that now that they were out it had grown so grossly dark; because, had it been true, life would have been so glorious, that now it seemed so mean and cramped and petty. Other people did not care. There was the usual crowd at the corners, life went on, women sang cheerily as usual, bairns played, the masses moved about their daily affairs. What did it matter to them that Christ hung dead, or was to be hustled into a convict's grave? But these two could not forget, nor get their minds to think of other things; their hopes were dashed, their hearts were darkened. And has not Carlyle taught us that our sorrow is "an inverted image of our greatness"? If this age is dowie, it is not through littleness, but because we had a marvellous

vision, and we risked for it, dared for it, gave for it, and looking out upon a world so muddy and so flat after it all, our hearts cannot forget, and that is what is wrong with us! And if our souls ache, yearning to be what it appears we cannot be, and chasing, futilely enough it seems, what we never attain, do you not see the glory of that useless-looking quest? For the degradation in a slave's heart proves he is not all a slave, that he has something in him that is free. The prisoner of Chillon had become accustomed to his lot; his narrow darkened cell had grown quite homelike with the years; he had made friends of spiders and the like, was in a way content; till one day, moved by some sudden whim, he clambered up the wall, holding on by hands and feet and the curves of his body, to the high little window, and looked out on the glorious lake, and the blue heavens, and his own white home nestling yonder among the dear hills, looked for a second, and dropped back. But how dark it had grown! How cramped and narrow and intolerable, choking him like a grave! Ah, God! he cried, beating upon the door, I must get out, must get out, must get out! He had seen. And you too have seen; and your heart thrills to it, claims it, runs out eagerly and cannot rest without it, nor forget it. William Watson tells us of a worker in a hideous factory town who has one day of respite, away from the mud and dirt and fumes, the gaunt and blackened trees, and all the squalor of the mean and sordid streets; one day in the clean country, with the sea and the hills and the sky and the wealth of beauty crowding everywhere; and then it is all over, and he journeys home, back to the meanness and the sordidness again, the same as ever. Yes, but he is not the same, must "carry in his soul the torment of the difference

till he die." And if, looking at Christ and then at your own life, at what you know God means this world to be and what it is, you too feel the torment of the difference, thank God! For there are some who are content; who have no dreams, are troubled by no visions, know no sting of yearning, no passion of longing, no despair. They are content.

Give thanks; and this the more, because your dreams are true. That was what these men found, when that Stranger came on them, and as He talked, it grew so plain and obvious. Where was their difficulty? What had stumbled them? Here were they crushed and broken, and the thing was true! "We hoped," and we were right! And if only you can come upon Jesus Christ, and indeed He is not far from any one of us, is looking for you everywhere, you too will find that your big dreams are true, your instincts after what seems too good to grow real not foolish but God-given; that, whatever its scale may be, your life can be shot through with beauty; however homely your sphere, it may be touched by the divine. Look, says Paul, to discouraged people fretting at the pettiness of their days, whose hands are hauling at the same rope with you! and they were God's! Look, cries Christ, holding up the promises, what God is sure you can become and do! Look, add these two, how much more splendid are God's plans than our own most audacious faith, which is only a wan reflection of His staggering realities!

> "Is it a dream?
> Nay, but the lack of it the dream,
> And failing it life's lore and wealth a dream,
> And all the world a dream."

But this is true, but this is true, but this is true! And if we believe it, we shall bring it nearer, you and I;

can make the road through trackless places whereby God in His Majesty will really sweep in. There is a great Buddhist scripture, one of the most popular of them all, which has a glorious ending. "Finally," it cries to souls discouraged by the steepness of the way to victory, "strive on, always remembering that God is not dead!"

XIX.

GOD'S SIDE OF THINGS, AND OURS: A COMMUNION MEDITATION.

"This is the day of the Lord's own contriving. Let us be glad and rejoice in it. O Lord, save us, we pray. O Lord, prosper us, we pray."—Ps. cxviii. 24, 25.

THIS is a day of the Lord's own contriving, which an infinitude of Divine love and thoughtfulness and grace has alone made possible. And therefore, in the first place, now that this bend in the road has brought us within sight of Calvary, let us stand still awhile and look, until we grasp and feel again the wonder and amazement of the facts that meet us here.

Mrs. Meynell has a little poem, which Ruskin, in a reckless burst of too exuberant enthusiasm, once termed the finest thing in modern poetry, in which she stands and, dallying with an ordinary daisy in her hand, peers, as through a window, far out into mysteries inscrutable to us; muses and dreams of all that lies behind that common weed, all that went to the making of it, all that had to be in order that it might exist—stands, all at once dwarfed, abashed, humbled, in a world suddenly grown awesome.

> "O daisy mine, what will it be to look
> From God's side even of such a simple thing!"

Was that the mood of this old singer of the long ago? Perhaps he had come up to the Temple as so often

before, by the well-known road that he had traversed scores of times, nodding to the usual faces on the way; and, standing in the accustomed place, had seen and heard the daily service move on through its customary stately ritual, perhaps dully enough, with a mind atrophied by long familiarity; perhaps really accepting the gifts offered—God's strange affection for us, God's eager forgiveness, God's stubborn faith in those who have failed Him so often and so signally, God's queer belief that even yet things can be righted and the twisted life made straight—accepting, but with little wonderment.

It was all so usual; it had all so often been experienced before, was taken as a thing of course. And suddenly the clouds were blown aside; and, with a heart stilled and awed and almost frightened, he saw things somewhat from God's side of them, all that had gone to the making of these gifts which he had been accepting so unthinkingly, stood there holding them in his hand, dazed and confused, thinking them out. This is a day which God alone could have contrived; and only Divine grace and loving-kindness and self-sacrifice have made it possible for me.

And is not that the mood that befits us here? At Christ's Table we do feel it somewhat, do we not?—do have a hushed sense that we are face to face with the central things; our spirits steal on tiptoe; our noisy natures sink their loud rude voices, because God is quite close.

Yet, even here, it is so easy to turn in without much emotion or surprise; to accept even Jesus Christ as only what is due to us; to thrust out a careless hand and take God's best without excitement as no very great affair. Yet think it out, see it from God's side,

and how staggering it is! Think out anything, indeed, and long before we reach an end our minds sink tired and fluttering helpless pinions into huge yawning depths and chasms past our fathoming. One of the few authentic poets of our day stands looking at a common dog-rose coming into bloom, and sees with amazement that the roots of that ordinary wayside bush run back almost to the beginnings of dim Time.

"Very old are the woods;
And the buds that break
Out of the briar's boughs,
When March winds wake,
So old with their beauty are—
Oh, no man knows
Through what wild centuries
Roves back the rose.

All that had to be before that innocent blossom, plucked by some child, who quickly tired of it and threw it away with a careless hand, could lie there withering in the hot dust.

Or we are whirled through the country, watch the smoke wreaths curling up lazily from sleepy homesteads in the sheltered hollows. And there are bairns upon their way to school, and women flitting to and fro about the doors, and men at work among the fields; and it is all so peaceful, so idyllic, drowsing there in the hot sun. And yet to make that cosy nook what unthinkable cataclysms and upheavals had to be; when the sea broke in, overwhelming all things, and for long æons rolled and tossed and surged above them here; when the mountains were heaved up with confusion and tumult, when the gliding glaciers slowly, age after age, ground down the jagged peaks to this soft billowy upland, when the kindly soil was fashioned by wild hurricane and bitter frost and howling tempest

out of the hard rocks—all that was necessary that these quiet fields might lie so soft and green and golden in the low morning sunlight.

And here are we, a company of needy folk gathering in hopefully about Christ's Table, sure that we shall be uplifted, granted every grace and power we can require. And yet, could we take these simple symbols into our hands, and realize all that went to the making of them; could we see from God's side of them, how staggering, how stupendous it would be.

The whole New Testament is just an effort to do that—to show us these things from God's side. They know that they are failing; they are conscious that it breaks through language, won't describe, eludes them; that, as Luther says, they are using half-words and quarter-words like a baby; they stammer, they stutter, tentatively they finger this metaphor and that, and then throw them away as really useless, hopelessly inadequate; they confess themselves at their wits' end, and yet cannot keep from trying desperately to make us see; they feel great tides and currents seize them and sweep them off their feet and far out into vast deeps, where they can but throw up their hands, and sink. And yet they do bring home to us something of the wonder of it all; do make us see it somewhat from God's side. Look! they cry, look! and, following their pointing finger, cannot you see that stolid knot of soldiery haughtily pushing back that jeering, hooting crowd; and that tired Figure in the midst, how worn, how broken in body from the horrors of the iron-tipped Roman lash? See, they have laid the Cross upon the ground, have thrown Him down upon it. Ah! the nails run like fire through the sensitive flesh! See! they have lifted Cross and Victim and—but the heart

cries out and looks away covering shrinking eyes. "It is excruciating," men sob in an agony, their faces all contorted, their hands clenched, maddened by what is really unbearable. "It is excruciating!" And excruciating means the pains of crucifixion. And the slow sun sets, and the long day wanes, and by and by the enemies are gone, chuckling at their complete victory, telling one another, "I always said, you know, that if only Caiaphas would act, we would soon stamp this out: but he is so cautious; very thorough though when he does move; well, anyhow that bubble's burst": and last of all the soldiers, hearing at long length the eagerly awaited curt word of command, fall in, eager to be away, and swing off, leaving the lonely crosses; and the stars steal out and look down coldly upon the dishonoured dead, hanging there on a convict's gibbet. And all that had to be before your heart could hear Christ say to you to-day, "This is My body, everything I have, and it is all for you."

Look! they cry, and, following their finger, cannot you see, past the Cross, far out into the eternities—see God as He really is? How different from what we had conceived Him, with His face grey with an agony that He has borne from all eternity! So have we hurt Him by these sins of ours which worry us scarcely at all; so intolerable to Him is this outrage of evil we have introduced into His Universe. And yet, although we have so wounded Him, He loves us, clings to us, cannot give us up. Always He has been planning how to help us; always He has been thinking how to save us from ourselves; counting no cost, reckoning up no sacrifice, heedless what it means to Him if only we be plucked back from self-destruction. And all that lies behind that crumb of ordinary bread; all that is

in it, could we see it from God's side of things. Take it, man, take it freely; it is meant expressly for you. But do not your hands tremble? For, to make that possible, Christ had to die, and God's heart had to break. It was watching a congregation gathering to a Communion that the poetess thought of a field of ox-eye daisies in the full blaze of sunshine.

> "I saw this people as a field of flowers,
> Each grown at such a price,
> The sum of unimaginable powers
> Did no more than suffice.
> A thousand central daisies, they,
> A thousand of the one;
> For each the entire monopoly of day
> For each the whole of the devoted sun."

Free though it be to you, the cost of that was all God's all. The wonder and amazement of the facts, seen from God's side of them!

And, then, our attitude in view of them. As to that there can be no dubiety whatever. This is a day of God's own contriving, which only Divine grace made possible. We must be glad and rejoice in it. What else is even thinkable if we really believe this, accept this, credit that Christ means what He says.

Austerely beautiful although it be, the characteristic note of our Scottish Communion rings flat in my ears, and out of harmony with the true spirit of the day. This is no time for grave and sombre melodies, but for happy faces and for happy hearts dazed and bewildered by the immensity of their own good fortune. "Dear me, Dr. Duncan," they said, for the old Hebrew Professor was striding along Princes Street in Edinburgh, his face aglow and shining, smiling to himself, cracking his fingers as he walked, "you surely have great news to-day."

"News!" he made answer. "News! Wonderful news—the best of news! The blood of Jesus Christ still cleanseth from all sin." So would we feel if we really believed this; if we were not doubting, not fearing, not spinning limiting conditions whereby we may be excluded, not wondering can it be really true, nor anything except accepting it. Our Lord tells us that the most speaking picture of a genuine Christian is a child, and the characteristic of a normal child is happiness. It cannot keep still, must sing and dance for the sheer joy of life. And in the Testament there is a sound of singing almost everywhere. They are the gladdest and the gayest people in the world. And little wonder! Imagine what it must have been to be immured in an appalling German prison camp. Not a doubt some of them were admirably run, but there were instances that pass description. Think what it must have meant to be penned into one of these; to have never a kindly word or human touch, to be beaten and bullied, to be starved and miserable, to have to drag oneself, though desperately ill, to one's excessive toil, to have the very women spit at you: to see the populace, as happened in one dreadful case, when virulent disease broke out, standing at a safe distance screaming with laughter, as, tottering unsteadily, one dragged one's dead companions to the burial-place, and made shift with shaking limbs to scoop a shallow grave for them: to be in the power of hatred, and unable to escape from it; and this for weeks and months and years. And then to land in England, suddenly to find that nightmare gone, with kindly faces everywhere, and compassionate eyes, and ready, helping hands, eagerly leaping out to one's assistance; to be in an atmosphere of love and pride in one, and endless sym-

pathy. That is the difference the faith made. People had thought that the Divine powers were hostile to us, must be hostile, because we have callously broken their laws. They tried desperately to forget; but, when they remembered, they crouched and cringed and shivered, expecting that any moment Divine wrath might leap out and blast them. And at the Cross they saw that God's heart is entirely with us; that He has not one thought towards us that is not kindly and generous and unselfish. And with that the sun broke out, and winter vanished from the earth, and of a sudden spring with its glory and its song and its rejoicing was in these folk's hearts. And we must take that in, and credit it as true for us—that God has never a thought toward us that is not merciful and gracious and very pitiful. Chalmers was no great success as a visitor among his congregation. Gladstone tells us how he once went a round with him, and how the great soul entered each new house, sat smiling, but without a word, for he had no small change of conversation, rose up, and went his way, with almost nothing said. Yet on occasion he could be effective enough. There was a melancholious soul who could not be got to believe that God could really love her, had in very deed forgiven her. And one day he burst in on her. "Madam," he said, "I've come to tell you God has no ill-will at you," and was gone. God has no ill-will at us! He might well have! Remember how we have neglected Him, forgotten Him, wounded Him, been impudent and insolent day after day. "If I were God," cried Luther hotly, "and the world had treated me as it has treated Him, I would kick the wretched thing to pieces." But God is incapable of harbouring grudges, of ill-humour and temper and peevishness; forgets, blots it all out;

begins again as hopefully and patiently as ever; loves on. Even Paul cannot understand that in the very least, is taken aback and staggered. It seems so unreasonable, so impossible! Why should He, and how can He? If we had been kind of half-decent—but to us—to us! Yet though he does not understand it, he believes it, accepts it, walks in the warm sunshine of it. And so must we. This is a day that only God could have contrived for us; let us be glad and rejoice in it. Dante tells us that in his grim journeyings he came upon some in an evil plight, and asked them why this had befallen them. Once, they explained, we were sad and gloomy and sour-humoured in God's beautiful earth. And, while life holds much of tragedy for some of us, and there are many things that hurt and stab these hearts of ours till some of us must bite our lips to keep from crying out in pain, still at Christ's Table to be grave of face and unexcited can only mean that we have not grasped and taken in all that this means, the wonder and amazement of it—from God's side of it, and from ours. When the West Indian slaves were liberated, they gathered on the momentous night into their churches and knelt there in prayer. But when the long-expected hour had at last actually struck, they leapt up to their feet, singing, rejoicing, and embracing one another, laughing in sheer happiness although the tears were running down their cheeks. Free! Free! Free! In such mood surely should we gather at Christ's Table, so awed, yet so exultant and so very happy. For we too, thank God, are free! This is a great day of God's own contriving for us; let us rejoice and be glad in it.

The amazement of the facts, our attitude in view of them, and, lastly, a practical use of them. For all

this, that cost so much, must not be allowed to evaporate in a mere gush of feeling and emotion, like a Highland burn roaring in spate, and yet to-morrow shrunk again to the usual thin trickle whimpering, half-choked, among the bare, bleached stones. It must be condensed to action, into real and purposeful amendment of our characters and lives. Scholars tell us that this Psalm was probably a shout of thanksgiving for some great victory, for the happy conclusion of a war in which things had for long looked ominous and hopeless. They were flocking up into the Temple to give thanks to God, like ourselves upon Armistice Day, when, for a few hours, we were really a religious people, with a vivid, almost overpowering, sense of God; when in many places, even in the heart of mighty cities, one had only, without announcement, to open a church and ring a bell, and in a few minutes it was packed from floor to ceiling with folk eager to bring their offering of thanksgiving. So perhaps it was here. And yet you notice this man's prayer: "O Lord, save us, we pray; O Lord, prosper us, we pray." But were they not there just precisely because God had saved them, and had prospered them in ways unbelievable, and yet gloriously true? Did this man feel that face to face with this colossal proof and instance of the lengths to which God's grace can go, it were sheer folly not to seize on it for all their other needs—for all the national sores, and all his personal weaknesses? O Lord, who can save so amazingly, save us from this, and this, and this, that still beset and threaten us: O Lord, who can bring success where it looked impossible, prosper us here, and here, and here, where we have failed, and lost heart, and ceased even to try! There is a moving scripture in which God, passing before Moses, proclaims Himself as "the

Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin." And we read how Moses hearing this made haste, and, seizing on that proclamation, applied it instantly to his own wants and needs. If Thou art merciful and gracious, since Thou forgivest iniquity and sin, pardon our iniquity, forgive our sin.

So Paul, too, standing at the Cross, feels in his heart that this finally settles it, that if God has gone this length for us there is nothing that He will not grant us. If He has given us His Son, will He not freely give us anything and everything that we can need? Well, here are we, face to face with this bewildering proof of what God means when He says that He loves us, of the lengths to which He goes, of the bewilderments He does, let us make haste, and before we pass into the world and it all fades away, grows dim and far off, and an unreal, shadowy rumour blown vaguely to and fro about the world, let us apply it to our own case—this overwhelming grace, this so illimitable love, this immeasurable power to help—to our temper, our ill-humours, our touchiness, our engrained selfishness, to our besetting sins, to the temptations that have so often broken us that, daunted, we make small show of resistance now, slink tamely to heel, obedient to their first truculent whistle. Save us, O Thou whose name is Saviour, and who hast wonderfully and most surely earned Thy title, save us from this, and this, and this; and prosper us in our endeavours to be done with our too fatally familiar self; to grow into Christ's mind and heart and characteristic ways, till, naturally and instinctively, we think His thoughts, and will His will, and live after His fashion. When the Lord Christ passed through a

village everybody felt that here was a God-given and enormous opportunity that might not come again, and laid hold on it with both hands; clutched at Christ's power, applied it to their individual weaknesses, translated it into the terms of their own personal wants. The blind cried give me sight; the deaf pled make me hear; the impotent besought Him for strength to be done with helpless, weary lying—to stand up, to live a full, whole, interesting life, the life of a real man. And this is a day that God Himself has contrived for us, and we must make haste to appropriate it, use it, think it out, apply it to our individual and personal case. No doubt we are here to give Him thanks for an amazing act of condescension, for a fulness of grace that staggers us, and takes away the breath, and leaves one dazed and stunned, if we see it at all from God's side. But then, when a wise Psalmist felt like that, and came up to the Temple of set purpose to make some return to God for His bewildering goodness, thinking things out, he came to the conclusion that the truest gratitude is to be willing to accept still more. "What shall I give to God for all His benefits?—I shall take," he said. And Pope—found, of all men, among the prophets—tells us bluntly he was right. "For God is paid, when man receives"; the way to thank Him is to take yet more, and more, and more.

The wonder and amazement of the facts! our attitude in view of them; a practical use of them! And so, let us sit down, wondering yet boldly, with the Master at His Table.

XX.

THE SIXTH SENSE.

"Behold the hour cometh, yea is now come, that ye shall be scattered, every man to his own, and shall leave me alone: and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with Me."—JOHN xvi. 32.

ACCORDING to the Buddhists, there are not five senses, there are six; and consciousness, the one we do not count, is much the most important of them all. To Christ, too, man is endowed with a sixth sense. And, royal equipment though the others be, each of them a new avenue leading far out into another world of mystery and of beauty, not taste nor smell nor touch, not sight nor hearing, no not all of them together, fills life with anything approaching the richness and the glory by which it is flooded by that other we forget, the sense of God. For surely to know God, however dimly and afar off, to feel His presence and be able to respond to it, is the very flowering of our nature. Yet many seem to lack the faculty; to be born poor, maimed things, blind in their soul. So at least Paul sometimes felt despairingly. The natural man, he cried out in a kind of baffled hopelessness, cannot know the things of God, because he lacks the organ with which they are discerned, as through this building now there are passing exquisite music from the great cathedrals and the sermons of the noblest preachers upon earth; and we know nothing of it all, sit bored by the prosing of

our own dull man, because, lacking the instrument to grip these others, that is all we hear. So thought Paul, feeling like a musician playing to the deaf, they possess nothing to which I can appeal, have no knowledge of all that they are missing, are most of them content without it, as we all are without the mass of happenings continually going on in this wonderful world that we have no senses to pick up. Once I remember being on a glorious summer evening in a lovely garden, full of a splendour of flowers and the young greeneries of early June, with a man born blind. And my whole heart ran out in sympathy to him, sitting there in the dark, with all that beauty round him, really there, so very near, yet for him non-existent! And with that, perhaps reading my thoughts, he spoke of how full and good a thing life is, adding with a laugh that seeing people always amused him with their unbelievable talk about their precious little faculty of which they make so much; but which, said he, we blind folk do not credit can really add much to the interest of things. And one could answer nothing; but, looking round on all that loveliness of sky and earth, colour and form and shadow, shut one's eyes and sat there in his empty, dreary, monotonous world. And he believed that that was all that life could be! To live without God in the world, to fail to see Him and to walk with Him, awakens that same shiver of sympathy and horror in the folk of the New Testament. They too close their eyes a moment, trying to imagine to themselves what it must be; and then open them quickly, fearing that this horrid nightmare might come true! But Christ held things were still more tragic, that nobody is born without the sixth sense, but that some cannot be bothered using it, till it atrophies and the nerve withers away, and for them

God goes out. Every one remembers Darwin's case; how he, who had been fond of music and literature, immersed himself for long years so completely in collecting facts and data and in the grinding out of scientific laws from them, that one day, happening in a leisure moment to turn back to his early loves, he found that he had lost all taste for them, so that to him Beethoven was now nothing but an irritating noise, and Shakespeare a pure boredom; knew that he had become a bird with broken wing, robbed of an element in which his nature ought to have been at home; tells us that had he life to live over again, he would with care devote some time each day to literature and music, so as to keep the sense for them alive. And to Christ the tragedy of many lives around Him was that while to Himself God was the most obvious of all facts, Whom He saw everywhere, and Who was always breaking in on Him, and Whom it was impossible to overlook, many had left no time for Him in their rushed days, till they ceased to miss Him, even to remember He was there; had lived so long in the darkness that the eyes of their souls had gone out, so that they stared at God and saw nothing, lived in days full of His manifest signs and wonders, and never noticed them. And are we not dim-eyed indeed, and have we not allowed this sense of ours to dwindle and degenerate sadly? "The child," says Browning, "feels God a moment, ichors o'er the place, plays on and grows to be a man like us"; and Traherne tells us, in many haunting pages, how almost every one begins in a wonderful world where God is everywhere, and how we so mismanage things that He fades out from us, and for us earth becomes a squalid place, compared to what it should have been, to what it used to be; aye and to what it really is.

No angels meet us nowadays, as they did men of long ago; our lives are much too hot and dusty, far too hurried and too practical for that. Ours is indeed a gross material age of ugly factories and tall chimneys belching smoke, full of the whirring and clatter of machinery, when poetry is largely dead, and the Divine has faded from the earth, leaving it flat and grey and muddy; so that it is difficult for us to think ourselves back into the feelings and conceptions of that older world, when people went their ways about the common things of ordinary life, hushed and expectant, and with hearts athrill, for always mystery enveloped them, and always the Divine was very near, crowding in upon them, and at any moment that thinnest of veils that alone hid it from them might be broken through, and it grow visible and there! One never knew when it might happen. Suddenly, upon the bare hillside, where but a moment since there were only the hot rocks and the withering undergrowth, one found oneself in the felt and immediate presence of Jehovah; or as one trudged the long, dry, wearying road, one turned a corner or a bluff of rock, and—"the angels of God met him." How interesting and how wonderful a world, when heaven was not far away but all but here; and when the spiritual was not always dim and shadowy and unseen and easily forgotten, but kept intruding into workaday affairs, was tangible and real.

Even to-day some of us have had vivid experiences of that feeling now and then. Sometimes as we have watched the tumult or the sunny twinklings of the sea, more often as we wandered through some wide and heathery loneliness, with nothing round us but the moorland stillness and the eerie moorland cries, or in the hush of evening woods when light was failing, or

stumbling unexpectedly on some still tarn lost in a tangle of the hills, quite suddenly an awe, half-fear, half-rapture, fell upon us, a sense of Something being there more than the eye could see, of Someone at our very side, Something and Someone who had all but burst through that impalpable that usually hides Him; a little more, a very little more, and we would see Him face to face; and with that we held our breath, and bowed our heads in worship, knowing God was very near, was there. Some of us know that feeling well. But it is intermittent. As a rule all that is very far away from the hot, fussy, flurried bustle of our crowded lives, from the blind, foolish common sense on which we plume ourselves so hugely. Almost entirely we have lost the wise childlikeness of other days that went about with wide and wondering eyes, saw the Divine where we see nothing but the empty air, heard Him where to us there are only the long moan and idle whistling of the wind, lived in a wonderful world that has grown dull and empty and unspiritual nowadays.

It is all beautiful as ever, Wordsworth says: "and yet I know, where'er I go, that there has passed away a glory from the earth." For the Divine has faded from it. That is no gain. Far nearer Christ's mind is that Oriental mood to which the earth is full of God, and instinct with His presence; and common ground apt to become a holy place; and menial duties sacraments bringing us to His very feet. Everywhere you find that in the Bible; always the Divine hemmed them in, and kept impinging on them, seeking an opening into their lives, and often gaining it, and—God was there! When in that dreary time of the national humiliation, Gideon made shift to save a little of the harvest of his croft from the enemies' keen eyes, and set to work to

thresh it in a hiding-place so cramped that there was no room for a full swing of the flails, as, crouching there, he beat with short half-strokes, and brooded in the bitterness of his hot spirit, the thought sprang up in him and gripped him, why if all the others hang back, if the princes who should lead are cowed and broken, why should not you, who are not cowed nor broken, though poor and mean and lowly, do what in you lies, and raise the standard of revolt for Israel and God ?—it was quite clear to him that it was not his own mind, but an angel, that had spoken to him that astounding message—and was it not ? Or when Elijah, in the terrible reaction that often follows mighty spiritual effort and excitement, threw himself down under the juniper bush, an overwrought, tired-out, beaten man, whimpering and complaining through sheer physical weariness, and somehow new hope came to him, it was an angel that had strengthened him, God's touch upon him that had given him new strength. Or when Lot resolved at last, for his soul's sake, to leave the poisonous atmosphere of Sodom, he could feel a hand upon his shoulder tugging him forward, could hear an urgent voice still crying Hurry, hurry ! Our dim, peering, modern eyes would have seen nothing but the little threshing-floor smothered in stour, and the bush casting its meagre shadow on the desert glare, and the door with an uncertain man brooding and hesitating, making his slow way to uncertain decision ; our modern minds stumble and grope among our psychologies, which we think very wise and marvellously profound. But to them it was plain that it was God who spoke, and God that urged, His angels that had met them. And Christ agrees with them. To Him too this earth is full of God. A wayside flower brought Him into the inmost presence,

a sparrow dead upon the road filled Him with an almost overpowering sense of the reality and nearness of that great Tenderness that had been here beside His little creature in its need. He too believed, as no one else ever believed, that we are all surrounded by an atmosphere of grace and love which keeps seeking for openings into our lives; that if we see the evil of our ways, that was God that warned us; and if we break free from our sins, that is His hand laid upon us; that if the unseen and eternal somehow grow more near and vivid to us, that is His voice reaching us through all the noise and babble of our lives. Always Christ, with that sixth sense of His, saw God plainly beside Him. Plans failed, and He looked up into His face with a happy confidence; things darkened, and He consulted God, speaking not to One far away, but at His very side; the people left Him, and his dearest friends, He saw, were on the point of flight, yet I am not alone, He said, for God is here, and seeing Him so obviously there went on undauntedly. If only we would use that sense of ours as He did His, what could check or frighten or withstand us? But, alas! in us is it not almost extinct?

Take it of nature, do we see Him there? Year after year He meets us in the wonderful sacrament of spring wherein, by sensible signs, He offers us such glorious things. Look round you then, and does not what you see meet every objection, and still every doubt, force you to grasp that the real God is the very God you need? Your soul is torn and wounded, but do you not see with what cunning tenderness the scars man makes upon the earth are covered over and changed into softnesses and beauties? Your heart is cold and dead, yet look what God can bring out of mere barrenness! For one with eyes to see, thought Whitman, a mouse is "miracle

enough to stagger sextillions of infidels," but who can look upon the spring and not feel his heart leap up within him with a rush of renewed hope and certainty and courage? Yet do we see it, you and I? Brother Lawrence was a raw lout of a soldier lad. And one day, limping footsore among his fellows, long past whistling, stolidly holding out, he saw beside the road the first tree bursting into leaf, and all at once his heart stood still. If God can bring that wonder of fresh life out of a thing so dead, what can He not do for my soul, he thought, and there upon the dusty road it all began. That is a gospel you can see from every window of your house, which God writes plainly upon every hedge and garden plot. But do we take it in?

> "Earth's crammed with heaven,
> And every common bush afire with God.
> But only those who see take off their shoes,
> The rest sit round it, and pluck blackberries."

Isaiah in discouraging days walked in a garden, and as he saw the green things coming through, and a witchery of flowers where a few days before there had been nothing but bare soil, his heart revived in a great shout of certain victory. It must come true, he cried, with such a God in the same world with us! Linnæus saw a bank of broom trumpeting its riot of glory to the heavens, and sank upon his knees, because God in His majesty was passing very near. But you and I—"It's rather warmer," so we say, and, "Some hope of summer at last," and that is all—never notice the august promises and solemn pledges written everywhere by God's own hand, that might well send us singing on our way as children do, for the sheer happiness of being alive.

Or do we see God in our own day and times and generation? That is never easy. For, as Erskine of

Linlathen says shrewdly, "The past is with God, and the future is with God, and so also is the present, but we do not feel this so much." That is true. It is not difficult to come on God in history: to watch, from later generations, how the huge slow wheels of His eternal purposes have steadily moved forward, how He has steered His way through all the babble and confusion and hot passions of men, using them in ways, that seemed at the time inscrutable, for His own wise ends. And we all hope that some day the earth will be lifted up somehow to far higher things than these poor rudiments that we see now. The past and the future, these are God's. But in our own day we have little hope of anything much happening. For God is surely less God than He used to be, much less efficient and effective. As Carlyle, old and discouraged, said to Froude, when he declared that he could only believe in a God who does something, "And He does nothing!" So people almost always feel concerning their own days. For it is not only Carlyle who, according to Maurice's gibe, believes in a God who died in the age of Oliver Cromwell. Long ago! ah yes, then He was a power in life, but now what use is He? In Jewish history how plainly He kept interposing, but in ours there is never a trace of Him. Had we lived in their day we would have listened to the prophets, but our preachers are such mannikins; our statesmen are so small, and what ear can detect in their raucous voices any trace of God's? Yet, in their own age, the prophets were ruled out precisely on these grounds. Jeremiah, many felt, was a sheer traitor, and they pushed him into jail: and I for one know well that I would have had nothing to do with him, know, from what I felt during the war, that I would have cursed him fiercely as a wretched pacifist at a time when

it behoved every man to throw in everything he had with both hands, and ungrudgingly ; yet there he stands, perhaps the greatest figure in the Bible after Jesus Christ. And Isaiah seemed the merest dreamer. And Jesus, express image of God's person as we now see Him to be, was in His own day regarded as a crazy tradesman, who had muddled Himself with things too deep for Him, and gone clean off His head ! It is never easy to see God in one's own time. And yet our enemies are here, and if God is only a memory of what once was, a hope of what may some day be, what use is He to us ? But, blessed be His name, God is alive, is in the world to-day as really as at Calvary. And it was Christ's tremendous sense of that that made His heart unconquerable, and enabled Him to do such mighty works. Always He saw God beside Him, always He relied upon His help, always He took His promises seriously, always He looked up into His face and asked for their fulfilment, always He went on facing impossibilities on the assumption that He had been heard ; and it came true. And if you and I could see Him, trust Him, throw ourselves upon Him, as Christ did, the works that He did we could do, and even greater, as He boldly promised us. But that sixth sense of ours has grown so dim ; we cannot see God except over a vast waste of intervening centuries, and will not credit He is here.

Or do you see Him in the facts of your own life ? Again that is not easy. We stand too near it, to follow its pattern. Sir Thomas Browne, looking back on his, speaks of it as " a miracle of thirty years " not readily credible to others, and indeed it takes a huge mass of grace to bring one through with honour, or indeed presentably at all. But some of us cannot see in the sunshine ; and their lives are so bright and happy, that

God's very kindness toward them hides Him from them. They feel no need of Him. And others of us cannot see in the dark. The least touch of trouble, and our faith snaps. Yet, says Browning, boldly facing tremendous things with steady eyes, "yet the dark, too, is God." Or, as it is said in Scripture, and "Moses drew near into the thick darkness where God was"; if you can make use of the sixth sense at all, you are quite sure to come upon Him there.

If you are tiring, if the burden seems too heavy for the shoulder, if your breath comes gaspingly, and your steps are shortening and growing slow, look up, for God is certain to be there. Have you not often found it so, that when you seemed beaten and all looked over, and the road ended abruptly at a crag that nobody could scale, or so you thought sitting down disconsolate, suddenly it twisted, and so opened out into a wide and roomy place; that when you could do no more, some help blown out of nowhere reached you in the nick of time, some one on whom you had no claim turned clean out of his way with sympathy and kindliness? "Without were fightings, within were fears," says Paul of a dark day of his life, but God, "who comforteth them that are cast down, comforted me by the coming of Titus." When the prison door was flung back that day, he rejoiced to see the daring lad, but what most moved him was that God had been thinking of him, had planned this for him, that here was another signal proof that He is really love. And Smetham, commenting upon that, remarks with truth that "nowadays providence usually sends Titus by post." Just watch and see how when you are dog-tired, some Titus, sent of God, will burst in on you in the oddest fashion.

Or in temptation, when the pressure of life is forcing

us down to an unworthy spiritual level, and our conscience is surrendering, and our strength giving underneath the steady strain, we can be certain God is there, that His angels will bar the way to failure, will hamper us, impede us, hinder us, delay us, make it hard for us to stumble, if they cannot turn us back, as Balaam found in his day, and as we have often learned in ours. For all we are sinning so constantly, God has made sin extraordinarily difficult for us. To reach it we must break through many a barrier, and close our ears to many warning voices, and struggle our hard way through many kindly enemies, seeking resolutely to deter us. And if we are at all in earnest in resisting our temptation, there is no reason in the world why we should slip or fall, for mighty forces are out and at work upon our side, God's angels have come forth and met us. We can be quite sure of that. And they are hard to pass.

Or, if our souls are fairly down, if all our efforts seem to have had no result except to prove our spiritual helplessness, if we incline to think that if we had never tried at all we would have been just this we are after all our hot and hard endeavours, that is a bleak and lonely road you have to travel, and yet it is within that valley, dry and uninviting though it looks, that the angels of God oftenest meet souls ; there that God startles them with His most gracious messages. It was to a broken, ashamed, hopeless lad that they drew near that first night Jacob saw them : it was when beaten to his knees and driven desperate that the amazement of Christ's grace came home to Paul, seized him, wrought wonders in him, made another man of him, enabled him to do and be at last what had been always clean impossible. And, if you too are humbled enough to be willing to accept it, then be sure that

with you also God will meet and offer you His grace. If only that sixth sense of ours were more highly developed, if only we would use it and see what is really here, God always close to us, how easy it would be!

There are two pathetic passages in Thomas Hardy's poems, one in which, worshipping with a Christian congregation, he feels himself an unwilling alien, cannot see what they see, nor grip what is so sure to them; and another, in which listening to a thrush singing, he wonders if there be a message of joy it has heard, which is quite dumb to him, to whom life looks so grey and bleak and shivery. There is. For we are not alone, but the Father is with us. And if only our eyes could be opened, as were those of that youth in his panic long ago at Dothan, and we saw how real and near and strong and all-sufficient God is, would not our fears sink into nothingness, and our hearts grow calm and strong and unafraid, brave with the fearlessness of Jesus Christ; and everything, even the best, become possible even for us? For God and you together, surely you can manage it! If only we would use that sixth and most important of them all, our sense of God!

XXI.

THE AUDACIOUS CLAIM OF THE HUMAN SPIRIT.

"Our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel."—2 Tim. i. 10.

EVEN Paul was not always at his best. High tides of the Spirit kept surging through his mighty heart, breaking ever higher and still higher. But to him also there came dull grey days when the receding waters left only pools and shallows on a heart grown, for the moment, largely bare and dry. Once, for example, he committed himself to the really fearsome saying that if this life be all, then let us eat and drink and frivol through it anyhow—what does it matter, if to-morrow we are dead! Hearing which, standing by the graveside of a child of his, Huxley felt gathering within him a hot indignation, a passion of contemptuous scorn for a view so mean. And surely we do choose righteousness, not only for its wages, but itself: see with Spinoza that Happiness is not something added to virtue, but that virtue is Happiness: and surely, even if we can never break through to a complete victory, we will die still fighting toward it. Tired and ill, the ageing, homeless, weary man who had staked everything on the cause, and not too much seemed to

be coming of it all, stumbled and lost step for an instant, when he cried despondently that if in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most miserable! At which one gasps in utter astonishment. It is so monstrously untrue! Who that ever knew Christ could possibly subscribe to that? Even if there were no after-life, if the grave ended everything, would we not still choose Him, for the glory of the struggle, for the splendour of His friendship, for the rapture and the richness of the life He gives us even here and even now, compared to which all the world's booths look dusty and tawdry and bedraggled, and their goods vulgar and soiled?

All which, of course, Paul knew immensely better than we do. And yet, as life advances, do we not understand increasingly how it thrilled him to be sure of immortality, and how his heart exulted at the thought of that vast unthinkable inheritance with which Christ has endowed us? For what a colossal difference it makes! Think of it! There are poor souls with hearts as tender and sensitive as our own, and for them there is nothing beyond the horizons of this cramped and narrow present! Their setting suns open no golden vistas far out into the infinities. For them this is all —this tiny islet of a life which the ruthless waves of time keep tearing down so swiftly and remorselessly. And they themselves are mere ephemerids, with this brief day, and then they go utterly out for ever and for ever; and their deepest affections are only transient shadows, passing ripples on the waters, seen and gone; and when their dear ones leave them, it is a final separation without any ray of hope; all that they knew and loved has crumbled into nothingness, and it can never be again—can never be ever again! The

" blank stare of the grave " ends everything, and there is nothing on the farther side.

> " No motion has she now, no force,
> She neither hears nor sees ;
> Rolled round in earth's diurnal course
> With rocks, and stones, and trees."

A dead thing among things as dead.

But we know that we are encompassed by an everlasting loving-kindness that will never cease : can stand and watch our loved ones sail out along a lane of gold straight into the glory of the setting sun, until our dazzled eyes lose sight of them somewhere in that splendour. For us, cries Paul, there is no death. It is abolished. It is blotted out. And if sore hearts, sitting in lonesome places, with hands feeling for what they used to have, cry out that it is still a grim and dreadful reality, which pretty words cannot explain away, Paul answers : But that is not death—that passing at a step from one bright and sunny room into another even sunnier and brighter. You never tasted the real bitterness of it all, you who can face it, knowing that you are as imperishable as the Eternal God Himself,— " This is not the end of me," said Campbell-Bannerman on his death-bed, when his colleague rose to go ; " we shall meet again, Asquith,"—you who know that your dear ones are as real as ever, not gone out like a light suddenly extinguished that leaves only a blank, empty, silent blackness ; you who can hear blown back to you from the other world that shout of happy voices that your hearts remember, giving thanks and praise for the grace that was sufficient, and the strength that proved enough. Blessed be God who has " brought life and immortality to light through the gospel " ! For, with the rising of that sun, the cold night is gone, and

a fair prospect stretches out and out endlessly before our eyes.

If it be true! But how does the gospel prove and make certain this glorious thing? Surely, to begin with, by its sense of the bigness of man, of every one. What a tremendous conception it has of a human life—how staggering, how awesome! Long, long ago, at the beginning of beginningless eternity, God was struck by a thought that fascinated Him, so that He said, "I will create this, I will make it real." And for interminable ages He was content to plan, to prepare, to toil for that. "Immense," says Whitman, "have been the preparations for me. Faithful and true the hands that have helped me. Cycles have ferried my cradle, rowing and rowing like cheerful boatmen." And at long length you came, God's thought embodied, His dream worked out at last! And is this all that is to come of it, these brief seventy years, and half of them mere sleeping? Does God tire so quickly of His majestic creations, and, like a capricious child, wipe out what He has finished, and forthwith draw something else on the blank space, with never a further thought of what went before?

Sometimes that seems likely enough for ourselves. We are so drab, so prosaic, so unimpressive, so lost in the crowd and entirely indistinguishable from our fellows at a very little distance, that, abashed, we feel there is no special necessity for our continuance—we, turned out by the myriad and according to pattern; and sometimes we would be content to be out of it all—at rest, these hot hearts of ours quiet at last, content if the most haunting lines in literature were true:

> "We are such stuff
> As dreams are made on; and our little life
> Is rounded with a sleep."

Yet have you never felt what Browning felt, that you "Know this earth is not my sphere. For I cannot so narrow me but that I still exceed it"; that there are prophecies and indications in you of something beyond; that there is more in you than can find expression here; that you are bigger than this life, larger than time; that, if this be all, then you have been fashioned ridiculously out of proportion to your environment? As Cowper once ended a letter to his cousin, Lady Hesketh, "There is not room enough for friendship to unfold itself in full bloom in such a nook of life as this. Therefore I am, and must, and will be, yours for ever, William Cowper."

At all events, we know people built upon so large a scale that immortality seems the one possibility for them. When the Lord Christ died, those who loved and knew Him could not picture Him as dead. After the first stunning, sickening shock, the thing just would not grip their minds. Surely those kind hands must somewhere still be leaping out in eager helpfulness for all hurt things; and surely that unselfish heart must still be carrying other people's burdens, as it always had. It seemed to them no wild crazy tale that He was alive, but on the contrary far likelier than not. Nature loses nothing, uses every atom jealously, over and over and over again. And that vast mass of love and kindness and unselfishness, which all His prodigal expenditure of it had, they felt, in no way exhausted, was all that just thrown away? Thirty years! It would take a whole eternity for that royal nature to express itself. And so they easily pictured Him to themselves as not dead but alive; as seated upon the right hand of God for ever; nay, they amended that—as standing, for in His eagerness to help and plead for

all needy souls He has sprung to His feet, is using His whole being, yonder as here, on their behalf, and will do so for ever.

And we have known people so big, so loving, so richly endowed, gifted with so generous an equipment at God's hands that all that they do, however brilliant and gracious, seems only a preface, a first chapter, a beginning. There must be far more. Marcus Dods, dear soul, had little poetry in him, but he once breaks out into the pure gold of it, when, commenting on one of the most mysterious of our Lord's sayings, he argues that as yet we are only children in the nursery; and that, as other bairns reveal their character with exactness when among their games and toys; as this one, grasping and peevish about his card houses, will be selfish and ill-tempered out in the real world; and this other, brave and good-natured over a childish trouble, will face the ills of grown life uncomplainingly; so these little ploys of ours, which seem so big to us, are at least a sufficient test of us and make clear who of us can be safely trusted to be set, no longer to transient things which at worst can be rubbed out again, but to the eternal realities which can never pass away. We shall grow up; shall pass out into the real world, and—

> "Doubtless unto them is given
> A life that bears immortal fruit
> In those great offices that suit
> The full-grown energies of heaven."

Man is too big for this to be all; it takes a whole eternity to justify the scale and plan on which he has been fashioned.

Further, says the gospel, it is obvious that we are being trained for something. Here is this difficult life of ours, with its pain, its trials, its temptations,

and the like. And what is to be made of it? Given that axiom of the faith that it is all a discipline, an education, deftly chosen to correct our faults, and produce in us that which will make us serviceable to God and our fellows, a fashioning of us under the blows of fate and on the anvil of circumstance into a weapon ready to God's hand, and sharpened for His purpose, then it becomes intelligible; and even when the winds are howling round us, catching away our breath, and leaving us cold and shivery, we can see that it is right and kind and wise; can trust where we don't understand; can bear the pain if it have meaning in it; can face the sudden darkness without growing overmuch afraid; can lose what is dear to us, and yet look up into God's face with eyes that trust Him, and a heart that is unflustered, because certain that He chooses wisely and well.

But if this life be all, how difficult it all becomes, how senseless it all seems, how the baffled heart cries out in sheer bewilderment and agony, Why, and Why, and again Why! A mind prepares itself through long, strenuous, laborious years, is ready for some high achievement, and then, sudden as a shot bird, it is struck down. Was all the preparation wasted? Or a man slowly and with pain, through God's guidance and help, fashions his character into a clean, strong, beautiful thing; and just as it is nearing perfection, he is swept out. Has God, then, interest only in the making of things, but none in the things when made? The problem has been solved; and He pushes aside the pieces, sets them up again for the unravelling of another riddle, the working out of holiness, given another setting of the board? And is experience only a mocking voice that tells us too late what we should have done,

with no practical value in it; as the man in Browning's poem looks back on life and sees it all—and knows now how the game should have been played—too late—for he is dying? Are we set to learn how life ought to be lived? And, having learned it, are we given no chance to put it into action? "Experience," wrote Horace Walpole to Hannah More, "reverses its utility by coming at the wrong end of our life when we do not want it." But does it? It is so obvious that we are being trained for something; we can feel God's hands at work upon us, the bite of His chisel, the strokes that are working out His plan in the dour lump of our character. And does that something never come? It was Lord Balfour who said that "if there be no other life, then this world is a stupid joke. And whose joke?" At least, surely Bishop Butler was right when he argued that this life is a first volume, which demands another to explain and complete it.

But our Lord comes to the problem, mainly from a different angle.

Browning in a passionate passage cries out fiercely:

> "If this be all
> And other life awaits us not—for me
> I say 'tis a poor cheat, a stupid bungle,
> A wretched failure. I for one protest
> Against it, and I hurl it back with scorn."

That is perhaps too peevish a reading of this glorious life of ours. For how astounding it is we are here at all! Ignatius Loyola sat down once to reckon up God's gifts to him, and got no farther than the first, "Myself"; sat there lost in wonder as it stared up at him. How bewildering that God should have chosen to fashion him rather than all the creatures whom He might have made! How high He has set us in the scale

of being, and how wonderful is this life teeming with rich interests He has thought out for us! And shall we poutingly fling this amazing thing down at His feet, as not worth having? And yet Christ agrees with him, or at least tells us bluntly that if this life were all, it would be a gift quite unworthy of God, and with no trace of His characteristic generosity and largesse; founds on God's love and faithfulness; and bids us remember that His love is an eternal love, His faithfulness an everlasting faithfulness. God's affections are not mere tents of a night, soon struck again: so that where to-day they are, to-morrow there is nothing. Where God loves at all, He loves eternally. "I am the God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob"; "God is not the God of the dead, but of the living." Can even we forget? A little one is taken, and the full years come and go. And there are other little voices in one's ears, and other little feet upon the floor. And yet always the mother's heart remembers and is not quite satisfied. And God! Does He love us the little moment we are here, and then the others take our places, and He is quite content without us? No, cries Christ, and there is almost anger in His tones! "As touching the resurrection of the dead, have ye not read what was spoken by God: 'I am the God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob?' God is not the God of the dead, but of the living." "Would it not be blasphemy," reflected Wordsworth in his day of sorrow, "to say we have more of love in our nature than He has? The thought is monstrous; and yet how to get rid of it except upon the supposition of another and a better world, I do not see." Do you imagine this is all that God can do for us—this that is accomplished before we die? We give ourselves to Him, and even here it is a glory

that whoso has tasted would not renounce for the whole world. And yet is it not as yet very largely a dream unattained, a yearning unsatisfied, a stretching out of groping hands that still come far short? And must not these shadows be thrown on our hearts by something, something real, something solid? Must not our dreams come true at last, and we be all that God Himself has taught our souls to yearn to be? Or else is not our conception of a worthy life bigger than God's, and our dreams nobler and finer and higher than His realities? Here, above all, are not Cowper's words unanswerable? This nook of a life is far too cramped a place for God's love and God's friendship to come to its full flower; and so we know that He is, must, and will be ours for ever. It takes a whole eternity for God's love toward us to work itself out. Remember, says Christ, that His grace is an everlasting thing that never tires, never runs dry, that even Calvary is only a cupful out of a river brimming and full as ever, that all that you experience here is a mere rill that loses itself in an ocean; and you too will lose yourself in it, be swept out by tremendous currents, with Divine love about you and beneath you and breaking over you, and on all sides of you far as the eye can reach and infinitely farther—for there is no bound, no shore, no end to this illimitable thing. "So I saw in my dream," says Bunyan, "that these two men came up to the gate, and as they entered they were transfigured, and there was given them raiment that shone like gold, and all the bells of the city rang for joy. And after that they shut up the gates, which when I had seen I wished myself among them." Blessed be God who has taken away the terror, and the blankness, and the loneliness, and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.

XXII.

OUR LORD'S SUPREME APPEAL.

"The Lord Jesus the same night in which He was betrayed took bread: and when He had given thanks, He brake it, and said, Take eat: this is My body, which is broken for you."—1 Cor. xi. 23, 24.

ON that evening in the upper room, so long ago, Christ took a bit of bread, an ordinary piece of common loaf, and gave it to them, to each one of them in turn. How simple an action, yet how adequate a promise of everything that we can need. "This," said Christ, "is My body," everything I have, My most, My best, My all, the whole of Me, and it is all for you; and, with that He put it into their hands; that, holding it, they might take that in. By which surely He means that, in our frail endeavours and stumbling efforts to climb out of ourselves to something higher, we can count with absolute certainty on this, that Christ, aye and the God we see in Him, has thrown in wholeheartedly on our behalf all that He is, and every power that He possesses. Everything He has is ours, and He keeps back nothing. If there is anything that He can do, we can be sure that He will do it; and anything that He can give, then He will give it; and any way at all in which He can possibly help, let the cost to Him be what it may, we can depend on that. "This is My body," everything I have; and it is all for you. For He is far more eager over our success than we are; we so

listless and apathetic, with our eager starts, and then we cannot be bothered, tire, and give it up; with our occasional efforts, and lapses of long forgetfulness; with our fitful desires that leap into a flame, and then die down again. But to Christ always this comes first, this is His life-work, upon which He has concentrated His whole being; this is My body, all I have; and you can draw and draw on Me, till there is nothing left.

So He claims: and has He not the right? For that was indeed the way He always lived, looking out with wonder on the selfish jostle in which we press and struggle, chasing our own desires, and pushing roughly towards our own interests. "I am come," He said, "to give my life a ransom for many." And it is a cramped and niggardly interpretation that limits that to the grim hours on Calvary, though it was there it reached its uttermost fulfilment. All day and every day He threw Himself away for strangers He would never see again; holding His life out, as Browning says, upon His hand for any man to take. No one was weary or hurt or sinful or troubled but Christ was there, because He could not keep away, feeling it like a personal sorrow stabbing at His own heart, and spending Himself to find some way to help; till the disciples remarked with alarm how tired He was looking, felt uneasily that He was healing others at the price of His own strength. But He would pay no heed. For always when some new panting claimant burst in, with no eyes for His white face, no thought for anything but the dear sufferer at home, and here was the great Healer who had cured so many, and who must surely help them too, almost before the breathless tale was well begun, Jesus was on His feet, had interrupted, "We must go and heal

him," He would say, and started eagerly. Mohammad in the days of his power lived in a cottage in a row, and cobbled his own shoes, and drove his women frantic by his habit of giving away all the food in the house—"They were hungrier than we," he would explain. Near his end he asked if there was any to whom he owed anything. "Yes," cried a voice, "a few shillings to me"; and it was eagerly paid. "I should have been so ashamed to face God with a debt," the prophet said. And Christ, who seems always to have felt that everything He had was given Him, not for His own use at all, but to be spent on others, would have been ashamed to face God had He kept back anything from them: lived day by day upon that basis, fed thousands with an ample meal, and had the crusts they threw away picked up as good enough for Him. With all your giving, counsels Thoreau, "see that you give yourself," or else your gift is but a poor one. Christ always gave Himself. This is My body; all I have, and it is yours. And He is the same Christ still. Calvin, speaking of His kingship, says that He reigns more for us than for Himself. What are power and dominion and the like to Jesus Christ, except in so far as He can use these on behalf of staggered, bungling, ineffectual souls? It is all yours, He says, looking at you. If there is anything at all in Me that meets your needs, take it; I have no other use for it, it is your own. For, characteristically, Christ defines friendship as a willingness to sacrifice oneself and all one has for the other's interests, and He pushes aside talk of Master and servant as not intimate enough to meet the case of Him and us. We are friends, He says, you and I; and of course you can use everything I have, as if it were your own; for, being Mine, it is yours. So that there is no need to rise and stumble

back to the old futile life from which you came; no need that all this should vanish, and the glow fade, and we jolt back again into the accustomed ruts; no need to take up the web of life again and continue its pattern unaltered; no need to assume that, while here it is easy to believe, far easier than not, here where a thick door has swung to between us and the babble and roar of ordinary days, in a little we shall have to rise and go back to the world that has not changed one particle because our mood is changed, but is still as set upon destroying as ever, and with the old result. All that is necessary only if there is nothing in Christ that meets your case. For look! He presses on you everything He has.

And is there nothing? Follow Him down the streets, you note how faces lighten, and souls revive, and hopes rise out of deep graves, and tangled lives are straightened, and sheer impossibilities get done. And is there nothing at all for you? Be sure that He stands to the characteristic marks He Himself gave—the blind see, and we are so blind to the divine; the deaf hear, and we are so dull to the voice of God; the lepers are cleansed, and our souls are very sin-sick; the dead are raised, and our hearts seem quite cold and callous and dead to all appeals; the poor have the gospel preached to them. A gospel? Is it not that we need? In all Christ presses on us with such eagerness, is there nothing at all that you desire? This is My body, everything I have, and it is offered you.

Further, before He gave, Christ brake it. "This is My body broken," mangled, done to death, for you. And, so saying, this most audacious of believers rose to the summit even of His faith. For consider the circumstances! Everything was over, hope seemed out, it was quite clear now that it was to end in disaster.

And Christ knew it, felt the chill from Calvary blowing upon Him; a few more hours, and He would have to face a gibbet. And He saw quite clearly what was bound to happen; the victims, He among them, staggering beneath their crosses, hurried by brutal soldiery, made peevish by the heat, and irritated by the hated tramp up the familiar road, and the slow boring day before them; the horror of the open shame, the long, slow, agonizing death, the going out with not one human being who really believed in Him or understood. Yet Christ was unafraid, there was no tremor in His hands, no wavering of His eyes. If this is God's will for Me, it is right and well and altogether good; if this is what He chooses for Me, then somehow it is going to come this way. "I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men to Me." So He took bread, and brake it, as if saying, Remember the gallows. Many other things you may forget, the days when the crowds clamoured round Me offering Me a throne, the triumphs of the early times; but remember my shame, burn the Cross deep into your mind. For if you see it, you will not be able to resist Me; you too will feel the pull, and have to come to Me.

And Christ was right. It has not always, indeed, been the Cross round which the Church has gathered. Once on a day, in the old Greek Church, it was beside the manger that they felt most moved; and in our time it seems to be the living, generous, kindly Christ of the three years that makes appeal to many younger minds. And yet nothing has touched the world like Calvary; nothing has changed so many lives, as that grim, ugly, convict's cross. Paul once came upon it, and it broke his heart. There he stood gazing, murmuring to himself like a man stunned, "He loved me and gave Himself for me," and turned at last and ran to burn out his

whole life in a passion of gratitude. "The love of Christ constrains me," he cried, shaking off kindly hands that tried to make him rest. What else can I do? And a poet of our own sums up the individual experiences of a countless multitude, telling us how he plunged on heedlessly, drowning his conscience, till suddenly he blundered full on something, and with that his heart stood still; came on one hanging on a tree who looked at him, and his whole soul grew cold and sick within him. For He "seemed to charge me with His death, though not a word He spoke." And he knew it was true.

That is the mystery of Calvary. It happened nineteen centuries ago, yet it is not a thing outside our lives, but in it; somehow we feel a sense of ghastly personal responsibility; look at our hands, and see with horror there is blood on them, Christ's blood; cry out, like Paul, in an agony, "I have crucified the Lord afresh, and put Him to an open shame"; "it is my sins that ran like nails into the very quick." Do not forget the Cross, said Christ; for "I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men to Me." And He says it confidently.

How do we meet that challenge? You remember how Mark Antony won over a whole hostile mob by drawing back the cloak from the dead form, and showing them the wounds of Cæsar:

> "I am no orator, as Brutus is;
> For I have neither wit, nor words, nor worth,
> Action, nor utterance, nor the power of speech,
> To stir men's blood: I only speak right on;
> I tell you that which you yourselves do know;
> Show you sweet Cæsar's wounds, poor, poor dumb mouths,
> And bid them speak for me."

I tell you, declares Christ with emphasis, you cannot see the Cross and go your way unwon.

Well, let us test it, let us try and see. You do see it,

do you not? A little this way, look, across the centuries, there through the press, that Figure near the column, so white and spent, fresh from the horror of the Roman scourging, bedecked now in those pathetic symbols. And, catching sight of Him, does not your heart too stop short with a sudden start, feeling that here a long, long quest has ended, and an old impossible dream come true, that here your soul has found its home and rightful king? For that aching of youth to be done with all authority, that fretting of the age to shake off all governance, and to be our own masters, living out our own lives in our own way with no one to withstand us, has faded, has it not, into a very mean thing? We are not big enough as yet for the liberty we claimed: are far from the day that Dante at last reached when he was granted crown and sceptre, and told that he could safely rule his life, and follow where his own desires might beckon. As things are, out on the high seas fierce currents sweep us where we have no wish to go, and thunderous billows, crashing against our vessel, batter it out of its course. And though we throw our whole weight on it, the wheel will not obey us, struggles and kicks like a living thing. We require hands, stronger and more skilled than our own, laid on ours: would gladly, could we find one we could trust, give over the ruling of our lives to a strong government that would save us from these fierce marauders that keep bursting in, and chase away these hateful unclean things billeted permanently in our hearts, and for whom, though we hate them, we must fetch and carry. As Wordsworth cried to Duty:

> "Me this unchartered freedom tires,
> I feel the weight of chance desires.
> I supplicate for thy control."

And is not this One who would rule you well; aye, and teach you to rule yourself, making a noble thing of life? And, with that, are you not down on your knees among the wild buffoonery of that scoffing rabble, but with no mockery in your heart, your hands stretched out, your whole soul crying to Him to take you, and keep you, and master you; to believe you now that you are sane; and when the mists come down into your brain again, and the old madness seizes you, not to give credence to you then, when you will tell Him you are tired of Him and will not brook His interference, but to be mercifully stern and kindly severe, and at all costs to save you from your foolish self? "I supplicate for Thy control." Is it so, or are you too mean to feel the thrill of Christ's appeal? I know men, so He said, I know their chivalry. Let them see Me broken for them, and I win. Well, you do see Him, does He win? Or has He pitched things too high for a puny soul?

Or let us climb this little hill, how strangely dark it is! towards these three crosses. No, not that one, nor that other, where they writhe, poor souls, in agony; but to this centre one, where He hangs in a calm that makes even that shame sheer majesty. Stand here a moment. Elsewhere you forget about it all, but face to face with Jesus and Him crucified, how is it now? Once far up the duckboard tracks to Paschendæle, in that wild land churned into a wilderness of shell-holes, like a tumbling, never-resting sea, I came on a dead laddie, lying all alone. Why, out of all the multitudes one saw he so affected me, I do not know. But he was Scottish, and he was young and very handsome, and somebody's dearest. And, somehow, the dead eyes seemed to look up into mine with solemn

challenge; and the dead lips to cry aloud till my heart heard, "This is my body, broken for you." And there we had a communion service of a kind, just we three, the Lord Christ, the dead laddie, and my soul; and I swore that because he had died for us, please God, I would be worthier for that sacrifice. And face to face with Jesus on the Cross, can you just turn away? Let them see Me, He said confidently, and they cannot! Yet, it seems, you can. And once in Targelle valley, burying over a hundred boys I knew in one long grave, as one moved to and fro about that weary task, rude words beat themselves into a limping rhythm like a footsore battalion trailing raggedly along, that sometimes to this day leap out of memory and challenge me:

"There's a little brae in Picardy,
A weary brae to me.
Yet as often as I close my eyes
Its grey-green slope I see.
The trench, the wire, the sunken road,
Are stabbed deep in my head;
For near a hundred of the lads
I found there, lying dead.

There's a little hill called Calvary,
Where God's Son died for me.
What it is like I do not know,
Its slope I'll never see.
Yet now, whene'er I think of it,
Whene'er the word is said,
How clear that brae in Picardy,
And the laddies lying dead!"

And can you stand under the Cross and look, and turn upon your heel, and go your careless way? Do not forget the Cross, says Christ. I know that that will win you. This is My body, and look how it is broken!

And it is "for you." Luther declared that all religion

lies in the pronouns. "For you," said Christ, and put it into all their hands; "for you," "for you," "for you," twelve separate times. They were a sorry little company, but not one was omitted. John had his temper, like you and me, but he was not passed by; "for you," said Christ. And Peter? Ah! poor Peter! Yet he received it; "for you," Christ said to him. Thomas was slow, had doubts and difficulties, and no aptitude for the thing, as we often feel disconsolately about ourselves. "For you," said Christ to him. Judas had dark things in his mind. "For you," said Christ, putting it in his hand in a last generous appeal. All of them were disappointing and heartbreaking, had trooped into that very room churlishly, their faces hot with anger and with temper in their eyes, but not one was left out. "For you." And so to-day, although we feel we have no claim, and that it cannot be for us, it is. Old John Duncan one day would not venture to the table of his Lord, felt he was too unworthy, and was sitting miserably under the pulpit when he saw a girl break down, and pass the cup untasted. Whereat, his fears all gone, the old saint cried to her in a carrying whisper, "Take it, lassie, take it, it is for sinners," and himself stretched out eager hands. It is for you, says Christ. That same Dr. Duncan used to admit that he could never get hold of Christ directly, but always through the conditions attached to the promises. He is "come to seek and save"; that passed him by. It cannot be me, he thought. He would never bother looking for such as I; why should He? But then he read on, "to seek and save that which is lost!" But I am lost! and it is me that He is seeking! "Hungers and thirsts" for what he has not got! But I am hungry! It is for me, then? "Perfect in weakness." I am weak

indeed, and it is all for me, it seems. Yes, says Christ, it is for you.

Nothing in the Bible is finer than Peter going back to the Ten, after the denial. Think of the sidelong glances and the ominous silence when he came in! They had all done ill, but he the worst. And yet he would not stay away; refused to be cast out from Christ by the aberration of one insane moment; thrust himself in, though with no plea that he could urge. And Christ said he was right. "Go tell the disciples and Peter," said the angel, or was it really Christ Himself? And the last they saw, as they sped on their errand and looked back, He was still saying, "be sure not to forget Peter, and tell him that I sent you." "For you!"

I think we should venture. It is queer company for Jesus Christ! But then it is His house, His table; He is the host; and if He chooses to send for you, who is to keep you out? And He is at the door looking for you, has a place prepared for you, sees you as you stand hesitating a great way off, and comes to meet you and to draw you in, letting you see how glad He is that you have come, and that to Him it would not have been the same at all if you had stayed away; keeps eagerly heaping up all that He has upon you. This is My body, and it is broken, and it is all for you!

XXIII.

ON COMING TO THE POINT.

"Now it is in mine heart to make a covenant with the Lord God of Israel."—2 CHRON. xxix. 10.

THERE are many who look wistfully towards the religious life, but have not an idea how to set about it. Let us take a typical case, a normal experience, and as we study it, please God, light may break in upon us, and we really get begun at last.

Hezekiah was regarded by his fellow-countrymen as their ideal monarch. The chroniclers have not been quite successful in conveying to our minds their own sense of the glamour of his personality; but they make it abundantly clear that in the long line of Jewish kings he stands alone, for the glory of his achievements, for the nobility of his character, for the rich and effective use that he made of a life that he gave back to God at last with an enormous interest accrued. Like some vast peak towering up among his fellows, so did he dwarf his predecessors, and make those who followed him look mere foothills. "Of all who went before, and all who followed after, there was like unto him—not one." This evidently was a great life, greatly used.

And what strikes one about it is how simply and unostentatiously it all began! Apparently he was quite undistinguished in his youth. We read of no dreams, no longings, no spiritual struggles and splendours.

An ordinary boy, he lived like others till he came to manhood, and then responsibility sobered and made him. For, as he looked out on the world so full of evils crying for redress, it grew on him that this life of ours is a grave and weighty matter, far too big to be idled away in mere pleasure and selfishness; rather is it a sacred trust, to be used loyally and with care for God and one's fellows; that to spend it on oneself were sheer embezzlement. And, though he said nothing, deep thoughts began to gather in his heart; till one day, without any noise or fuss or pother of emotion, they spilt over. "I have it in my mind," he quietly remarked, "to make a covenant with God"; made it and stood to it; and so it all began; so quietly, so undramatically. And in that there is hope and encouragement for some of us. For many feel uneasily that they are not the stuff out of which spiritual folk are made; and this because their soul as yet has known no cataclysms and upheavals. They are clean, kindly folk, with a frank interest in life, not unaware of God's pull upon their soul, not altogether heedless of it. But they have looked at some of the great spiritual autobiographies—Paul's, Bunyan's, Augustine's—those grim tales of mental agony and desperate wrestlings in the dark, and they take it for granted that this is the essential beginning of a really spiritual life; and because it is all quite foreign to their own experience, assume that they are giddy and frivolous creatures with which even God cannot do very much; or at least wait, aimlessly enough, till some gale of the Spirit catches and speeds them out on to the high seas where those huge tides are running; meantime rock idly in some forgotten backwater, dawdling about the empty quays, or heaving on the fat and oily waters.

Yet, while it is true that some natures need something catastrophic to set the rusty wheels of their wills in motion, often, perhaps oftener, it is not so. God does use the earthquake and the thunderstorm; but He produces most of His effects noiselessly. The kingdom of heaven, said Christ, is like a harvest field, "first the blade, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear," and you hardly notice it growing. And many of God's greatest saints have had no titanic struggles. Isaiah turned in to the Temple one day, in that year that king Uzziah died, and in a little while went out into the streets again. And no one of his fellow-worshippers knew that he had made the great decision, and had entered on a life that is telling on us even yet. Kingsley walked by the seaside; and that evening notes in his diary, "My birthnight! Before the sleeping earth and the sleepless sea and stars I have devoted myself to God, a vow never, if He give me the faith I pray for, to be recalled." And that was all. And Hezekiah simply made a resolution, and held to it; so quietly and so unostentatiously did it begin.

Well, here are we, shy, reserved people, bashful of emotion. Has anybody in his mind to make a covenant with God? Make it then. Do not listen to me further. Make it, and stand to it. The great thing is to come to a decision, actually to begin; for, as Ovid says, the first step is half of the journey. And Calvary is just a means to thrill and force us into that, to make it easy and inevitable for us. Sign you your covenant, give yourself to God, lay down your life before His feet, let go your hold on what you know is spoiling your life. And for you too it will have started.

Yet, when Hezekiah made his covenant, he felt that he was not at the beginning of things by far, rather at

the end of age-long processes. "I have it in my mind," he said, "to make a covenant with the Lord God of Israel."

He had been brought up in a practically heathen country, his own elder brother had been sacrificed in the fire to an obscene deity, he himself had always been surrounded by pagan customs; nor do we read that he had protested. Apparently he had done what he was told to do, acted like all the others round about him. Yet, when he began to think for himself, the God of his fathers claimed him; instincts that he felt to be very old awoke within him, clamorous and insistent, the piety of hearts long dead broke through the horrors of his own lifetime and called imperiously to his soul, and with that his feet turned of themselves into the path to God, a path beaten plain and broad for him by those whose journeyings were over, long and long ago. "I have it in my mind to make a covenant with the God of my fathers, for He is my God too!"

And you and I cannot really give ourselves to God, for we belong to Him; were dedicated to Him at the start. They took our little life and laid it in His arms, clutched at the promises and wrote our name across the best of them, looked out into the darkness of the future—holding who knew what?—and reassured themselves, because one thing was certain that God's goodness and mercy would follow us all our days, marked Christ's mark upon us, remembering that He is a good Shepherd, and will let none of His flock stray. As Wordsworth said of that so momentous day for him:

> "I made no vows, but vows
> Were then made for me; bond unknown to me
> Was given, that I should be, else sinning greatly,
> A dedicated spirit."

All that happened to us. Only the other month they showed me an old bundle of letters faded with age in which a mother—long dead now—set down all her longings for her wonderful baby boy; and as I read, my soul blushed red. Because the writer was my mother, and the baby boy was I. And yet it is not all only a pretty picture; truth and fact and reality are in it. We may forget and wander into far countries, but always we come to ourselves again. For something follows us, haunts us, finds us; we become home-sick, for, prodigal children although we may be, wayward and heartbreaking, we are God's children, and belong to the family. As Tennyson has it:

> "Good ye are and bad, and like to coins,
> Some true, some light, but every one of you
> Stamp'd with the image of the King."

And if one drop, His hands keep searching for us in the darkness till He finds us, because we are His. "It is only reasonable," says the Apostle, to give yourself to God; for you are His already. Has anybody in his mind to make a covenant with God? What do you say to making it just here, just now?

You have always meant to do it, have you not? And yet somehow it is not done. You know that this and that has to be broken, and you fully mean to break it, some day, that recedes, it seems, with our advance, so that we never reach it. So, says Christ, we go drifting through our lives, always intending to do what in point of fact we are not doing; always speaking to God in the future tense; always agreeing heartily with everything He says, and making up our minds, only to forget all about it, or to push it from us, or to find some reason for a fresh delay; always bending for the leap,

yet never actually leaping, till death is like to find us, still upon the wrong side of the flood! As John Foster has it: "A man thinks of some desirable alteration in his plan of life. Would it be a good thing? It certainly would be a very good thing: he wishes it were done: he will attempt it almost immediately. The following day he doubts if it would be quite prudent; many things have to be considered; what would people say? And thus, though he does not formally renounce his purpose, he shrinks out of it; with an irksome wish that he could be satisfied of the propriety of renouncing it; and at last surrenders it, to be perhaps resumed when the same feeling returns, and to be in the same way relinquished." Whereat our conscience looks us in the eyes and says, Thou art the man! Yet God is amazingly persistent. "And the Lord came, and stood, and called as at other times, Samuel, Samuel!" "As at other times!" How often we have suddenly been roused out of our spiritual drowsiness by an insistent hand that would not let us sleep our lives away; been startled by a voice calling our name; and turned, to find God looking full into our eyes, speaking a message to our individual souls! Perhaps in our mechanical and listless fashion we were hurrying through our daily portion of the Scriptures, with the familiar words making no bite into our minds, no real impression on our half-attention, vaguely slipping through our brains and out again, when something sprang forth and arrested us forcibly and abruptly, as if we were seeing it for the first time; suddenly the well-thumbed page became a new thing to us, a personal message spoken straight to us; and with that a new duty had been laid upon us, a clearer understanding of God's grace or will come home to us, a voice, which we knew to be God's voice, rang

out clear, authoritative, pleading, not to be denied, calling our name! Or, we turned into church just as we usually come, prompted at best by a half-conscious feeling it is as well to be upon the road that Christ is said to travel, but with no serious expectations we should really come on Him, and of a sudden He was there! No one else appeared to see Him; even those in the next pew looked quite unchanged, rose up quickly and went back to their usual lives; but we had heard God talking to us face to face, had felt the touch of His strange healing on our souls; it was to us that He had spoken, us He had singled out, our name He called! So through a hundred providences that voice, there is no mistaking, speaks to us as truly as if He and we were alone in the world. Or do you never hear it now? Can you live on contentedly, just what you are, untroubled by the old ambitions and the hungry dreams? Ah, me! it is not because He has fallen dumb, but because that fearsome spiritual deafness has begun to steal upon you which, when God speaks, looks blankly, and hears never a sound.

Hush! hush and listen! For once more, as at other times, God has drawn near, and calls your name, eagerly, urgently. Hush! listen! Not a sound? Surely you hear! What is it He is asking of you? Sometimes it is a summons to go back—back to the old ideals that we have let slip, back to the first love and the hot enthusiasm, back to the clearer-sighted faith of wiser days, before the world encroached upon us inch by inch, and wave by wave, as the sea slowly eats its way into the land; before we had agreed to compromise between Christ and self-interest, between what we know to be right, and what we find to be possible. Go back, He cries, and there is pleading in His voice, as if He saw chasms

and horrors in our path we do not see ; as if to Him this decent, respectable life of ours, at which no one can point a finger, were the slow murdering of a soul ! When Jacob had grown old and frail, worries and grievous troubles came on him. And God, as is God's way, drew near with help ; yet with a curious message surely. " Go back to Bethel, and dwell there." Bethel ! How long ago it seemed since that terrified conscience-stricken lad had fled over the hot sand, hugging the cover of the friendly boulders ; with many a panic-stricken glance across his shoulder, until at last the slow sun sank, and he could lie there panting in the sheltering darkness, safe ! How very long since he had dreamed his dream, and seen his vision, and raised his altar, and vowed his vow ! And in the intervening years much of the old nature, once tamed, had broken free and had crept back on him again, and the vow lay forgotten. And Jacob understood. " Arise, and go to Bethel," came God's voice. And Jacob said to his household, " Put away the strange gods that are among you, and be clean, and let us go to Bethel ; and there will I make an altar unto the God who met me there, and answered me, and went with me upon my way." And have we no Bethels ? Have you forgotten, asks Bunyan, the byre and the lane and the like where God met with you—the first Communion, the last night in the old home, that illness when you learned how tender God's touch is, that joy that made you ashamed and humbled you before His feet ? Ah ! we have wandered far since then ; and many a cloud has obscured the stars by which we were to steer ! We have lost sight of the great plans we once drew for life, and have run up a mean, rough deal, ramshackle structure after all, have let the world convince us, have fallen tamely

into step, doing what others do, and living as they live! And to-day God is calling us to put away the strange gods that have crept into our soul; to go back to the lost ideals, that were not foolishness but wisest wisdom; to the old singleness of heart and aim, to the undivided loyalty that had time to work for Christ and live for Him; when God, who has grown so dim and shadowy to us in these latter years, was the one fact of all facts for us; when we lived in a world thrilling and instinct with His manifest presence, full of the ministry of angels, of hands that helped, and powers that worked for us, and strong grace always following and hovering above us in our need. Has anybody in his mind to make a covenant with God? Then make it. Catch the tide now lapping round that stranded hulk of yours far up on the hot beach, and you may sail the whole wide seas of God; but, lose it, and are you not like to lie there, till it rots and falls to useless matchwood?

And you always want to do it, mean to do it, is it not so? Yet somehow we do not do it. We are like those Hebrew slaves when the seventh year was at the door, and they grew restless, eager, fidgety; at last lay down one night, but not to sleep; for to-morrow the long dream was coming true at last, to-morrow they must be offered their liberty, to-morrow they could look their fellows in the eyes as a man should, to-morrow, yes to-morrow, would be free. And yet, just when the hopeless longings could become reality, doubts sprang up in their minds. After all, slavery meant food and shelter and defence by the strong arm of a master, whowould not allow his people to be maltreated, whereas out in the unsafe world what could one poor man do? And then there were the tuggings of affection holding

one back. For if one had married when a slave, one's wife and children were the master's property, and had to be left behind. Could one undo the clinging of the little hands about one's neck, and set them down, and push them for ever away, and fare forth by oneself into a lonesome world. No! slavery upon the whole was better; and when the morning came they spurned the proffered liberty, for which their whole life had for years been one obstinate ache, elected to remain a slave for ever! And is not that our case? "Whosoever," said Christ, "commits sin, is the servant of sin"; and indeed we have sold ourselves into a ghastly servitude. And we too chafe and fret at the shame of our bondage: cry out, like Paul in his agony, that a thing not ourselves, a horrible thing, lives in us and rules us, that its foul desires drag us unwillingly behind them, that we are helpless in its hands, for writhe and struggle how we may we cannot break away. And ah! how the intolerable shame of it stings and bites, at times, like lashing whipcord! To be led at the heels of this impudent bully, subject to its beck and call! What would we not give to be done with it, to have no gyves eating into our wrists, no fever in our blood, no innate waywardness tricking us unto sin; but to be our own masters, leading the life we feel we ought to live, and being what we wish to be in the sane moments of our soul? We fall, give away again to the old selfishness or temper, some one of our passions mastering our control carries us away where and as it chooses, like a helpless rider at the mercy of a frightened horse. And when the thing is over, a savage self-contempt at the whole miserable business takes possession of us, a sort of helpless wonder at ourselves, a grim determination that here and now this thing must end. And with that we

vow hot vows and swear sturdy resolutions, that never again, not even once, shall we be mastered like this, never once again. And we mean it, mean it intensely at the time. Yet, when the next temptation leaps at us, when we are given the next opportunity of breaking free, we hesitate and falter! The door stands open: neither man nor devil can slam it in our face, here is our offer of liberty, but we grow not so sure! Oh, we still mean to do it, but why now, and why just here? end, with the fetters from which we had burst, not yet cold, on our wrists once more! The plain fact is we are not better men and women, not because we cannot be, but because, when the pinch comes, we do not want to be. We are always on the point of making that covenant, but—always it can wait a bit. Our spiritual life is one long inconsistency, a choosing what at other times we hate, a pushing from us what at other times we had hotly desired. As old Quarles puts it:

> "I like, mislike, lament for what I could not,
> I do, undo, yet still do what I should not,
> And at the self-same instant will the thing I would not."

To the Hebrew slave there came no second chance. But, God pity us, our danger is that we receive so many, that we feel there is no urgency, no need for definitely choosing now. If a line were drawn across our path, and if we knew that here, once and for all, we must take either sin or Christ, we would cry Christ! But there seems never any such definiteness. God is merciful, and will contrive endless chances for us yet! If we do not close with Him to-day, well, there will be to-morrow! "How often," says Augustine, "does a man, when heavy sleepiness is upon his limbs, defer to

shake it off; and, though not approving it, encourages it. Even so I was sure it was better to surrender to Thy love than to yield to my sins; and yet, though the former course convinced me, the latter pleased and held me bound. There was naught in me to answer Thy call, 'Awake thou that sleepest,' but drowsy, drawling words, 'Yes, yes, presently; in a little while.' But that presently had no present, and that little while grew long. With what lashes did I scourge my own soul! Yet it shrank back, it refused, though it had no excuse to offer! I said, 'Come, let it be done now.' And as I said it, I was on the point of resolve. I all but did it, yet I did it not; and I made another effort, and all but succeeded, yet did not reach it, nor grasp it; and the evil to which I was accustomed held me more than the better life I had not tried." But that is spiritual suicide, slow but sure. For each time we are moved and nothing comes of it, it grows less likely anything will ever happen. Stone by stone we are immuring ourselves in the thick walls of the habits we are building round about us. Even yet we can squeeze through the ever-lessening gap. But a little longer, and we shall be cut off in the prison of our own character, past all real hope of change. While you are hesitating, the stream grows and grows. Leap, man! leap boldly now! Has anybody in his mind to make a covenant with God? Dare you? as the old man asked the youth so eager to find the court of King Arthur. Once pass beneath that archway, so he warned him, and he will lay vows on you which it is a shame "not to be bound by, yet the which no man can keep." Dare you? If not, said he, "remain without, among the cattle of the field!" Can you? Or, like Al Ghazzali, the greatest and most fascinating of Muhammadans, who,

discovering that his fame was ruining his soul, determined every morning to slip away, and every day found his resolution oozing from him, until every night he was still there, and this for weeks and months, until he cast himself on God, a beaten weakling so he felt, beseeching Him to do in him what he himself had failed to do, have you too found that you are helpless? Make your covenant with God upon that basis. Tell Him that you are beaten, that your heart will not choose what you wish it to choose, nor your will will what you want it to will; that He must do it all. And He will take you on that understanding. Only you act, not simply talk of acting by and by; not waiting until once again your resolution, not yet dry, is smudged off by a passing sleeve. Has anybody in his mind to make a covenant with God? Make it then, in God's name; and make it now!

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